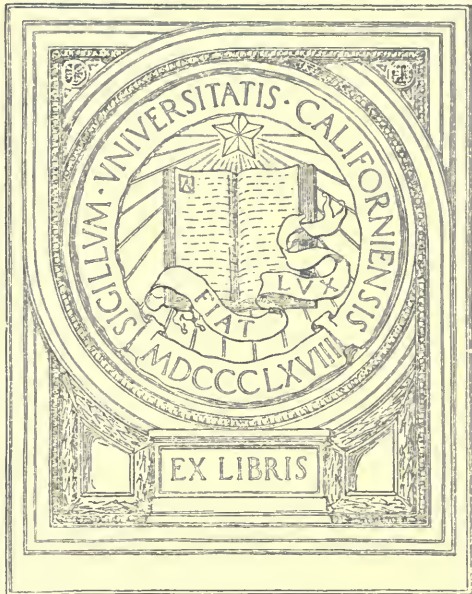


A BOSWELL  
OF BAGHDAD  
E·V·LUCAS

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
AT LOS ANGELES



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A BOSWELL OF BAGHDAD

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A BOSWELL OF  
BAGHDAD

WITH DIVERSIONS

BY

E. V. LUCAS

METHUEN & CO. LTD.  
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.  
LONDON

*First Published in 1917*



PR  
6023  
L 9660

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A BOSWELL OF BAGHDAD



# A BOSWELL OF BAGHDAD

## I.—INTRODUCTORY

A CURIOUS and very entertaining work lies before me, or, to be more accurate, ramparts me, for it is in four ponderous volumes, capable, each, even in less powerful hands than those of the Great Lexicographer, of felling a bookseller. At these volumes I have been sipping, beelike, at odd times for some years, and I now propose to yield some of the honey—the season having become timely, since the great majority of the heroes of its thousands of pages hail from Baghdad; and Baghdad, after all its wonderful and intact Oriental past, is to-day under Britain's thumb.

The title of the book is *Ibn Khallikan's Biographical Dictionary*, translated from the Arabic by Bn Mac Guckin de Slane, and printed in Paris for the Oriental Translation Fund of Great

## A Boswell of Baghdad

Britain and Ireland, 1842-71, some centuries after it was written, for its author was dead before Edward II ascended the English throne. Who would expect Sir Sidney Lee to have had so remote an exemplar?

Remote not only in time but in distance. For although we may go to the East for religions and systems of philosophy that were old and proved worthy centuries before Hellenism or Christianity, yet we do not usually find there models for our works of reference. Hardly does Rome give us those. But there is an orderliness and thoroughness about Ibn Khallikan's methods which the *Dictionary of National Biography* does not exceed. The Persian may be more lenient to floridity ("No flowers, by request," was, it will be remembered, the first English editor's motto), but in his desire to leave out no one who ought to be in and to do justice to his inclusions he is beyond praise.

The modernity of the ancients is continually surprising us. It is one of the phenomena to which we are never quite inured (and could we be so we should perhaps merely substitute the antiquity of the moderns as a new source of wonder),

## A Persian Gossip

but towards such inuring Ibn Khallikan should certainly help, since he was eminently a gossip, and in order to get human nature's fidelity to the type—no matter where found, whether æons ago or to-day, whether in savage lands or, as we say, civilized—brought home to us, it is to the gossips that we must resort: to the Pepyses and Boswells rather than to the Goethes and Platos; to the little recorders rather than the great thinkers. The small traits tell.

Ibn Khallikan's Dictionary is as interesting as it is, not because its author had any remarkable instinct as a biographer, or any gift of selection, but because if a man sets out to take account of everything, much human nature and a little excellence are bound to creep in.

I do not pretend to have dug in these volumes with any great seriousness. My object has been to extract what was odd and simple and most characteristic, in short, what was most human, and there is enough residuum for a horde of other miners. But I warn them that the dross is considerable. Ibn Khallikan's leniency to trivialities is incorrigible, and his pages are filled with pointless anecdotes,

## A Boswell of Baghdad

dull sayings, and poetry whose only recommendation is its richness in the laboured conceits that he loved. So much did he esteem them that were, say, all English intellectual effort in every direction at his disposal to descant upon, his favourite genius would probably be John Lyly.

But although most of the poetry admired and quoted by Ibn Khallikan is marked by affectation, now and then—but very rarely—it is beautifully simple. Thus, in one of the poems of Ibn Zuhr, a learned Moslim teacher and physician of Spain (1113-99), is expressed, with a tenderness and charm that no modern or no Greek of the Anthology could exceed, the ardent desire which he felt for the sight of his child, from whom he happened to be separated: *I have a little one, a tender nestling, with whom I have left my heart. I dwell far from him; how desolate I feel in the absence of that little person and that little face. He longs for me, and I long for him; for me he weeps, and I weep for him. Our affectionate wishes are weary with passing from him to me, from me to him.*



## Himself

### II.—IBN KHALLIKAN

Let me say something as to who Ibn Khallikan was. His father, Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim, was professor in the college at Arbela founded by Kukuburi, or the Blue Wolf, the governor of that city and the region of which it was the capital, the brother-in-law of Salah Ad-Din, the sultan, whom we in England know as Saladin, the enemy of the Cross, and the son of Ali Ibn Bektikin, known as "Little Ali, the Ornament of Religion." Kukuburi, who, although standing for the Crescent and all that was most abhorrent to our Crusaders, was famous as a founder of asylums, schools, hospitals for the blind, homes for widows, orphanages, and so forth, made special favourites of the family of which Ibn Khallikan was a scion. Ibn himself was born on September 22, 1211, and before he was two had begun instruction by his father and was the recipient of a certificate from Zainab, a very learned lady, stating that he was an industrious pupil.

In 1229, after having already read and studied much, particularly theology and law, Ibn

## A Boswell of Baghdad

Khallikan left Arbela with his brother and entered the college at Aleppo, then an educational centre, remaining until 1234. After this he moved from one place to another, always seeking more knowledge, until 1247-8, when he is found at Cairo occupying a seat in the imperial tribunal and acting as deputy for the kadi Sinjar, chief judge and magistrate of all Egypt. Later he himself became the kadi of Al-Mahalla, and by 1256, when he was forty-five, he had married, become a father, and had completed the first copy of his *Biographical Dictionary*, which was, of course, as we must always remember in connexion with the books mentioned in these Lives, a manuscript.

In 1261 he was appointed chief kadi over all the provinces of Syria, with his tribunal at Damascus, in which post he remained for ten years. He was not, however, sole kadi for long, as three others were appointed to assist him: a development that was meat and drink to the local satirists, one of whom wrote: *The men of Damascus are bewildered with the multitude of legal decisions. Their kadis are all suns, and yet they are in the dark.* Another said: *The people of*

## Law and Literature

*Damascus have witnessed a perfect miracle: the greater the number of suns the more the world is in the dark.* Being found wanting, and replaced, Ibn Khallikan took a professorship in Cairo, learned by heart further enormous quantities of poetry, and engaged in literary discussions which, judging by a specimen given in one of his Lives, were even more futile than discussions usually are.

The vicissitudes of fortune, always noticeably extreme in the East, brought him again to be kadi at Damascus in 1278, when his reappointment was signalized by public ceremonies, including the composition by numberless poets of congratulatory and adulatory verses, which must have been very dear to his simple old heart, and not the less so because he may have discovered from his astonishing repertory that not all were strictly original: such discoveries and the tracing back of the loans to their fount being the greatest of his pleasures.

Thereafter, until the year 1281, the Kadi lived with much honour, famed as the most learned and widely-read personage in Damascus, filling his house with scholars and discursive amateurs of verse, and engaging in conversations

## A Boswell of Baghdad

that are described by a friend as “most instructive, being entirely devoted to learned investigations and the elucidation of obscure points.”

But Ibn Khallikan, who was now nearing three-score years and ten, was destined still to misfortune, for suddenly, in 1281, he was deposed from his kadi-ship and, more than that, thrown into prison on the charge of having made a remark detrimental to the sultan, Kalavun. A pardon soon after arriving, he was liberated and again reinstated; but after ten more months as a kadi he was, in 1282, dismissed finally, and this time he refused ever more to leave his house, and died there in the same year.

Not a word (you will say) so far as to Baghdad. But although Ibn Khallikan spent most of his life in Egypt or Syria, the greater number of his heroes were, as I have said, citizens all of the city of the romance which recently has fallen to Sir Stanley Maude's gallant forces. Yet of the romance which we shall always associate with Baghdad he knew nothing. To him it was delectable (and perhaps even romantic too—each of us having his own conception of what romance is) because grave bearded men there taught religion,

## Contests of Euphuism

explained the *Koran*, disputed as to points of grammar, exchanged sarcasms and swapped verses. Not, however, as I hope to show, unamusingly.

What indeed I particularly like about the book is the picture that it gives of sardonic pleasantry and intellectual and sophisticated virtuosity going quietly on side by side with all the splendours and barbarities of absolute autocracy and summary jurisdiction. It throws a new or unaccustomed light on those days. Not even yet—not even in Bloomsbury, where the poets meet—have we in England anything quite like it; whereas when Baghdad and Damascus were the theatres of these poetical and hair-splitting competitions our ancestors had but just got the woad off.

### III.—MEN OF LETTERS

Those of us who know Baghdad only through the *Arabian Nights* and the ingenious productions of Mr. Oscar Asche, were not prepared for such a complete foreshadowing of the literary life and the literary temperament as Ibn Khallikan gives us.

Here, for example, is a poem by a book-lover

## A Boswell of Baghdad

—or manuscript-lover, to be more exact—written by Ibn Faris Ar-Razi, the philologist, who died before the Norman Conquest, which a later Occidental can cheerfully accept and could not much improve upon: *They asked me how I was. I answered: "Well, some things succeed and some fail; when my heart is filled with cares I say: 'One day perhaps they may be dispelled.' A cat is my companion; books, the friends of my heart; and a lamp, my beloved consort."* That is modern enough! Something of this kind, which is an earlier version of Omar Khayyám's famous recipe for earthly bliss, has often been attempted since by our own poets; but nothing better. Favourite books, a lighted lamp, a faithful cat, and the library were paradise enow. It is odd, by the way, that Omar Khayyám himself, although his dates qualify him, is not found in this work. But to make tents, even with leanings towards astronomy, was no high road to Ibn Khallikan's sympathies. Had Omar explained the *Koran* or had views on the suffixes of words, all would have been well.

While on the subject of sufficient paradises let me quote some verses by Ibn Sukkara Al-Hashimi, a famous Baghdad poet of the tenth century: *The*

## The Seven Essentials

*winter set in, and I provided myself with seven things necessary when the rain prevents us from pursuing our usual occupations. These things are: A shelter, a purse, a store, a cup of wine preceded by a bit of meat, a tender maid, and a cloak.*

Ibn Khallikan does not let it stop there, but fishes up from his memory a derivative, by Ibn Al-Taawizi, running thus: *When seven things are collected together in the drinking-room, it is not reasonable to stay away. These are: Roast meat, a melon, honey, a young girl, wax-lights, a singer to delight us, and wine.*

So much for the modernity and sense of comfort of the Persian author, as he flourished in Baghdad all those years ago. But there was then still more in publishing than yet meets the eye. The books of the juriconsult, Al-Mawardi, for example, reached posterity almost by chance. While he lived he did not publish any of his works but put them all up together in safety. On the approach of death, however, he said to a person who possessed his confidence: "The books in such a place were composed by me, but I abstained from publishing them, because I suspected, although my intention in writing them

## A Boswell of Baghdad

was to work in God's service, that that feeling, instead of being pure, was sullied by baser motives. Therefore, when you perceive me on the point of death and falling into agony, take my hand in yours, and if I press it, you will know thereby that none of these works has been accepted [by God] from me. In this case, you must take them all and throw them by night into the Tigris. But if I open my hand and close it not, that is the sign of their having been accepted, and that my hope in the admission of my intention as sincere and pure, has been fulfilled."

"When Al-Mawardi's death drew near," said his friend, "I took him by the hand, and he opened it without closing it on mine, whence I knew that his labours had been accepted, and I then published his works."—But what a responsibility for a friend!

Penmanship being, of course, the only medium between author and readers in those days, it follows that calligraphy was held in high esteem, and among famous calligraphers was Kabus Ibn Wushmaghir, who, although "the greatest of princes, the star of the age, and the source of



## The Beloved Calligrapher

justice and beneficence," thought it worth while (as all mighty rulers have not) to write a most beautiful hand. When the Sahib Ibn Abbad saw pieces in his handwriting, he used to say: "This is either the writing of Kabus or the wing of a peacock"; and he would then recite these verses of Al-Mutanabbi's: *In every heart is a passion for his handwriting; it might be said that the ink which he employed was a cause of love. His presence is a comfort for every eye, and his absence an affliction.*

The extraordinary literary activity of those times may be illustrated by the following passage dropped casually into the biographical notice of Ali Talib: "The grandson of this thief was the famous Al-Asmai, the philologist, who composed treatises on the following subjects: the human frame; the different species of animals; on the *anwa*, or influence of the stars on the weather; on the letter *hamza*; on the long and the short *elif*; on the difference between the names given to the members of the human body and those given to the same members in animals; on epithets; on the doors of tents; on games of chance played with arrows; on the frame of the

## A Boswell of Baghdad

horse; on horses; on camels; on sheep; on tents; on wild beasts; on the first and fourth form of certain verbs; on proverbs; on words bearing each two opposite significations; a vocabulary; on weapons; on dialects; on the springs of water frequented by the nomadic Arabs; a collection of anecdotes; on the principles of discourse; on the heart; on synonymous terms; on the Arabian peninsula; on the formation of derivative words; on the ideas which usually occur in poetry; on nouns of action; on *rajaz* verses; on the palm-tree; on plants; on homonymous terms; on the obscure expressions met with in the Traditions; on the witticisms of the desert Arabs." Ibn closes the list with the word "etc." The late John Timbs could hardly beat this record of industry and versatility.

There is hope for authors in the following story of Ibn Al-Khashshab, who knew the *Koran* by heart and was a scholar of considerable attainments. "When he died," says the Katib Imad Ad-Din, "I was in Syria, and I saw him one night in a dream, and said to him: 'How has God treated thee?'

## Crumbs of Comfort

“‘Well,’ he replied.

“‘Does God show mercy to literary men?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘And if they have been remiss?’

“‘A severe reprimand will be given, but,’ Al-Khashshab was moved to add, and let us never forget it, ‘then will come eternal happiness.’”

There are other scraps of consolation, scattered about the volumes, which apply not alone to men of letters. The Prophet, for example, once said: “Every lie shall be written down as a lie by the recording angels, with the exception of three: a lie told in order to reconcile two men; a lying promise made by a man to his wife; and a lie in which a man, when engaged in war, makes a promise or a threat.”

But the most solacing sentiment in the whole four volumes is by the poet Abu Nuwas Ibn Hani, who carried Hedonism very far: *Multiply thy sins to the utmost, for thou art to meet an indulgent Lord. When thou comest before Him, thou shalt behold mercy and meet the great, the powerful King. Then thou shalt gnaw thy hands with regret, for the pleasures which thou avoidedst through fear of hell.*—It is, says Ibn Khallikan, a “very fine and

## A Boswell of Baghdad

original thought." It could certainly be a very stimulating one.

### IV.—THE FIRST GRAMMARIAN

Grammarians and Traditionists (both given also to poesy) being Ibn Khallikan's real heroes, let me say something of each. A Traditionist was a learned man intimate with the *Koran*, whose duty it was to separate the spurious traditions which so naturally would have collected around such a figure as Muhammad from the true. As to the importance of the *Koran* in Moslim life and its place as the foundation of all Moslim learning, let the translator of Ibn Khallikan be heard. "The necessity," he says, "of distinguishing the genuine Traditions from the false gave rise to new branches of literature. A just appreciation of the credit to which each Traditionist was entitled could only be formed from a knowledge of his moral character, and this could be best estimated from an examination of his life. Hence the numerous biographical works arranged in chronological order and containing short accounts of the principal

## The Birth of Grammar

Traditionists and doctors of the law, with the indication of their tutors and their pupils, the place of their birth and residence, the race from which they sprung, and the year of their death. This again led Moslim critics to the study of genealogy and geography. The use of writing existed in Arabia before the promulgation of Islamism, but grammar was not known as an art till the difficulty of reciting the *Koran* correctly induced the khalif Ali to make it an object of his attention. He imposed on Abu 'l-Aswad Ad-Duwali the task of drawing up such instructions as would enable the Moslims to read their sacred book and speak their language without making gross faults."

Another version of the beginnings of grammar eliminates the khalif Ali altogether. The story goes that as Abu 'l-Aswad Ad-Duwali (603-88) entered his house on a certain day, one of his daughters said to him: "Papa! what is most beautiful in the sky?"

To this he answered: "Its stars."

But she replied: "Papa, I do not mean what is the most beautiful object in it; I was only expressing my admiration at its beauty."

## A Boswell of Baghdad

“In that case you must say,” he observed,  
“‘How beautiful is the sky!’”

Upon thinking this over, says Ibn Khallikan, Abu 'l-Aswad invented the art of grammar.

Abu 'l-Aswad Ad-Duwali thus is the father of this book, for had there been no grammarians I am sure that Ibn Khallikan would never have written it. Poetry tickled him; but grammar was his chief delight, as it was the chief delight of all his friends and, one gathers, of all Baghdad. Here is an example: “Al-Mamun, having asked Al-Yazidi about something, received from him this answer: ‘No; and may God accept my life as a ransom for yours, Commander of the Faithful!’

“‘Well said!’ exclaimed the khalif. ‘Never was the word *and* better placed than in the praise which you have just uttered.’” He then made him a present.

We get an insight both into the passion for the new science of grammar and what might be called the physical humour of the East in this anecdote. Abu Safwan Khalid Ibn Safwan, a member of the tribe of Tamim, was celebrated as an eloquent speaker. He used to visit Bilal

## Bilal the Logical

Ibn Abi Burda and converse with him, but his language was frequently ungrammatical. This grew at length so irksome that Bilal said to him: "O Khalid! you make me narrations fit for khalifs to hear, but you commit as many faults against grammar as the women who carry water in the streets."

Stung with this reproach, Khalid went to learn grammar at the mosque, and some time after lost his sight. From that period, whenever Bilal rode by in state, he used to ask who it was, and on being answered that it was the Emir, he would say: "There goes a summer-cloud, soon to be dispelled."

When this was told to Bilal, he exclaimed: "By Allah! it shall not be dispelled till he get a full shower from it;" and he then ordered him a whipping of two hundred strokes.

When books were so few and most learning came through the ear, memory had to be cultivated. The Traditionist, Ibn Rahwaih, was a Macaulay in his way. "I know," he used to say, "by heart seventy thousand traditions; I have read one hundred thousand, and can recollect in what work each is to be found. I never heard

## A Boswell of Baghdad

anything once without learning it by heart, nor learned anything by heart which I afterwards forgot.”

The sittings of the teacher, Ibn Al-Aarabi (767-846), who knew by heart more poetry than any man ever seen, were crowded by people anxious for instruction. Abu 'l-Abbas Thalah said: “I attended the sittings held by Ibn Al-Aarabi, and saw there upwards of one hundred persons, some asking him questions and others reading to him; he answered every question without consulting a book. I followed his lessons upwards of ten years, and I never saw him with a book in his hand; and yet he dictated to his pupils camel-loads of philological information.”

The grammarian Moad Ibn Muslim Al-Harra left some good poetry, which he gave as having been uttered by genii, demons and female demons. The caliph Ar-Raschid once said to him: “If thou sawest what thou hast described, thou hast seen wonders; if not, thou hast composed a nice piece of literature.”

An-Nahas the grammarian who, on being given a turban-cloth, would cut it into three from



## A Short Way with Reciters

avarice, met his death, in 950, in an unfortunate manner—being, although living in so remote a period, mistaken for a “profiteer.” I quote Ibn Khallikan’s words: “He had seated himself on the staircase of the Nilometer, by the side of the river, which was then on the increase, and began to scan some verses according to the rules of prosody, when a common fellow who heard him said: ‘This man is pronouncing a charm to prevent the overflow of the Nile, so as to raise the price of provisions.’ He then thrust him with his foot into the river and nothing more was heard of him.”

Not all these learned men were philosophical, even though they were philosophers. Abu Nizar Ibn Safi Malik An-Nuhāt assumed the title “Prince of Grammarians,” but if any other name was given to him by those addressing him he would fly into a passion.

The old fellows could be superstitious too. It is amusing to read that Abu Obaida, when repeating passages of the *Koran* or relating Traditions, made mistakes designedly: “For,” said he, “grammar brings ill luck.”

## A Boswell of Baghdad

### V.—THE FIRST PROSODIST

After grammar, prosody. That a falling apple should lead Sir Isaac Newton's thoughts to the problem of gravity is not so remarkable, but that the laws of prosody should result from an equally capricious occurrence strikes one as odd. I mention the discoverer's name partly that school-boys may remember him, or not, in their prayers. It was Al-Khalil Ibn Ahmad who, at Mecca, had besought Allah to bestow upon him a science hitherto unknown. Allah being in a complaisant mood, it followed that not long after, walking in the bazaar, Al-Khalil invented prosody as he passed a coppersmith's and heard him hammering a basin.

Once started on his career as an inventor, he continued; but a later discovery cost him dear, for having resolved on devising "a method of calculation so simple that any servant girl who knew it could go to a shopkeeper's without incurring the least possible risk of being deceived by him in the sum she would have to pay, he entered the mosque with his thoughts occupied on the subject, and he there struck against a

## A Nation of Poets

pillar, which his preoccupation hindered him from perceiving. The violence of the shock threw him on his back, and death was the result."

Al-Khalil used to remark that a man's reason and intelligence reached perfection when he attained the age of forty, the age of the Prophet when God sent him forth on his mission; but that they undergo alteration and diminution when the man reaches sixty, the age in which God took the Prophet's soul to himself. He said, again, that the intelligence is clearest at the dawn of day.

### VI.—A GROUP OF POETS

No matter what the profession or calling of these Persians—whether they were lawyers or lawgivers, grammarians or warriors—they all, or almost all, adored verbal felicity and tried their hands at verse. Poetry may be called the gold dust on their lives.

Ibn Nubata the poet knew how to say thank you. Saif Ad-Dawlat Ibn Hamdan having given him a horse, this is how he acknowledged it: *O prince! thou whose generous qualities are*

## A Boswell of Baghdad

*the offspring of thy natural disposition, and whose pleasing aspect is the emblem of thy mind, I have received the present which thou sentest me, a noble steed whose portly neck seems to unite the heavens to the earth on which he treads. Hast thou then conferred a government upon me, since thou sendest me a spear to which a flowing mane serves as a banner? We take possession of what thou hast conferred and find it to be a horse whose forehead and legs are marked with white, and whose body is so black that a single hair extracted from that colour would suffice to form night's darkest shades. It would seem that the morning had struck him on the forehead and thus made it white, for which reason he took his revenge by wading into the entrails of the morning, and thus whitening his legs. He paces slowly, yet one of his names is Lightning; he wears a veil, having his face covered with white, as if to conceal it, and yet beauty itself would be his only rival. Had the sun and the moon a portion only of his ardour, it would be impossible to withstand their heat. The eye cannot follow his movements, unless you rein him in and restrain his impetuosity. The glances of the eye cannot seize all his perfections, unless the eye be led away captive by his beauty and be*

## An Emir on Fleas

*thus enabled to follow him.*—I like the extravagance of that. So should the friend of man be extolled.

Emirs did not disdain to be poets. Majd Ad-Din Al-Mubarak Ibn Munkid, although at once "The Sword of the Empire" and "The Glory of Religion," wrote poetry, and not always on the most exalted themes. Among his poems, for example, is one on fleas, in which those insects, of which Emirs should know nothing, are thus described: *A race whom man is permitted to slay, and who profane the blood of the pilgrim, even in the sanctuary. When my hand sheds their blood, it is not their own, but mine, which is shed.* "It is thus," says Ibn Khallikan gravely, "that these two verses were recited and given as his, by Izz Ad-Din Abu 'l-Kasim Abd Allah Ibn Abi Ali Al-Husain Ibn Abi Muhammad Abd Allah Ibn Al-Husain Ibn Rawaha Ibn Ibrahim Ibn Abd Allah Ibn Rawaha Ibn Obaid Ibn Muhammad Ibn Abd Allah Ibn Rawaha Al-Ansari, a native of Hamat."

Ibn Khallikan's greed for poetry led him, as I have said, not only to quote most things that he could remember of each poet, but to cite also the

## A Boswell of Baghdad

poems of which those reminded him. Sometimes he quoted before he was sure of the author; but it made no difference. Thus, of Al-Farra the grammarian he says: "No verses have been handed down as his excepting the following, which were given by Abu-Hanifa Ad-Dinauri on the authority of Abu Bakr At-Tuwal: *Lord of a single acre of ground, you have nine chamberlains! You sit in an old ruin and have door-keepers who exclude visitors! Never did I hear of a door-keeper in a ruined dwelling! Never shall the eyes of men see me at a door of yours; a man like me is not made to support repulses from door-keepers.*" Having got his quotation safely into print, Ibn Khallikan adds: "I since discovered that these verses are attributed to Ibn Musa 'l-Makfuf. God knows best!" It is a charming way of writing biography. The grass does not grow upon the weir more easily. With such a rectifying or excusatory phrase as "God knows best" one can hazard all. And how difficult it is to be the first to say anything!

Here is a poem by an Emir's vizier, Al-Wazi Al-Maghribi: *I shall relate to you my adventure; and adventures are of various kinds. I one night*

## Six Singing Generations

*changed my bed and was abandoned by repose ; tell me then how I shall be on the first night which I pass in the grave ?*

Another vizier, Ibn Al-Amid, the katib, who lived in the eleventh century, wrote as follows: *Choose your friends among strangers, and take not your near relations into favour. Relations are like scorpions or even more noxious.* Asked which was the worse of his two recurring maladies, gout or colic, he replied: "When the gout attacks me I feel as if I were between the jaws of a lion devouring me, mouthful by mouthful ; when the colic visits me, I would willingly exchange it for the gout."

Poetry in those days ran in families. The family which had the greatest skill in the art was that of Hassan Ibn Abi Hafsa, for it produced six persons, in succession, all of them poets. These were : Said, his father Abd Ar-Rahman, his father Hassan, his father Thabit, his father Al-Mundir, and his father Hizam. Abd Ar-Rahman began very young. It is related that having been stung by a wasp, he went crying to his father, who asked what was the matter. He replied: "I have been stung by a

## A Boswell of Baghdad

flying thing, dressed, as it were, in a double cloak of striped cloth."

"By Allah!" exclaimed the delighted father, recognizing a chip of the old block, "thou hast there pronounced a verse."

The family of Abi Hafsa came next to that of Hassan in poetical gifts. The reason was, according to one statement, that they could "all touch the point of their nose with their tongue, and this denotes a talent for speaking with elegance and precision." "God knows," Ibn Khallikan adds, "how far that may be true!"

It was Marwan Ibn Abi Hafsa, of this family, who made such a mistake (in a poet depending on the beneficence of the exalted) as to commit himself to the sweeping statement, in his elegy on the death of Maan, the Emir, that patronage had died with him. "It is said," Ibn Khallikan relates, "that Marwan, after composing this elegy, could never gain anything by his verses, for, as often as he celebrated the praises of a khalif or of any other person less elevated in rank, he to whom the poem was addressed would say to him: 'Did you not say, in your famous



## An Unlucky Compliment

elegy: *Whither should we go, since Maan is dead? Presents have ceased and are not to be replaced?* So the person he meant to praise would not give him anything nor even listen to his poem."

But once — having the persistency of the needy—Abi Hafsa scored. The story goes that, entering into the presence of the khalif Al-Mahdi with a number of other poets, he recited to him a panegyric.

"Who art thou?" said the khalif.

"Thy humble poet, Marwan, the son of Abi Hafsa."

"Art thou," said the khalif with great presence of mind, remembering the poet's useful indiscretion, "not he who said: *Whither should we go, since Maan is dead?* and yet thou hast come to ask gifts from us! *Presents have ceased*; we have nothing for thee. Trail him out by the leg!"

They trailed him out by the leg, but, twelve months later, Marwan once more contrived to gain admittance with the other poets, who, at that time, were allowed to enter into the khalif's presence once a year. He then stood before him

## A Boswell of Baghdad

and recited the kasada which begins thus: *A female visitor came to thee by night; salute her fleeting image.*

Al-Mahdi at first listened in silence, but as the poet proceeded, he became gradually more and more agitated, till at length "he rolled on the carpet with delight."

He then asked how many verses were in the poem and, on being answered, "One hundred," he ordered the author a—present of one hundred thousand pieces of silver.

The poet Ibn Ar-Rumi met his necessary end with composure. Al-Kasim Ibn Obaid Allah Ibn Sulaiman Ibn Wahb, the vizier of Al-Motadid, dreading to incur the satirical attacks of this writer and the outbursts of his malignant tongue, suborned a person called Ibn Firas, who gave him a poisoned biscuit whilst he was sitting in company with the vizier.

When Ibn Ar-Rumi had eaten it, he perceived that he was poisoned, and he rose to withdraw; on which the vizier said to him: "Where are you going?"

"To the place," replied Ibn Ar-Rumi, "where you sent me."

## Palmy Days of Patronage

“Well,” observed the vizier, “you will present my respects to my father.”

“I am not taking the road to hell,” retorted the poet.

Another poet, Ibn Sara As-Shantarini, falling upon evil days, became a bookbinder. As such he wrote the following poem: *The trade of a bookbinder is the worst of all; its leaves and its fruits are nought but disappointment. I may compare him that follows it to a needle, which clothes others but is naked itself!*

### VII.—POETRY'S REWARDS

The Patron was a very real factor in the poetical life of Baghdad.

Here is a story told by the poet Abu Bakr Ibn Al-Allaf. “I had passed a night at the palace of Al-Motadid with a number of his other companions, when a eunuch came to us and said: ‘The Commander of the Faithful sends to tell you that, after you withdrew, he did not feel inclined to sleep, and composed this verse: *When the vision of my mistress, fleeting through the shades of night, awoke me, behold! my chamber was deserted, and far*

## A Boswell of Baghdad

*off was the place of our meeting.* He says also, continued the eunuch, 'that he cannot complete the piece, and will give a rich present to anyone who adds to it a second couplet to his satisfaction.'

"Those who were present failed in accomplishing the task, although they were all poets of talent, on which I," says Abu Bakr, "hastened to pronounce the following verse: *On this I said to my eyes: 'Sleep again; perhaps the vision, in its night visits, may return to me!'*"

The eunuch then retired, bearing Abu Bakr's not very remarkable effort with him, and having come back, said: "The Commander of the Faithful declares that your verse is perfect, and he has ordered you a present."

Sometimes the passion for verse enjoyed and encouraged by these courtly gentleman seems to reach absurd lengths. Thus Abu Tammam At-Tai, the poet, once recited to the Emir Abu Dolad Al-Ijli the following lines: *At the sight of dwellings abandoned like these, and places of joyous meetings now deserted, our tears, long treasured up, were shed in torrents!*

Abu Dolad so admired the piece that he gave the poet fifty thousand dirhems, saying: "By

## The Irrecoverable Past

Allah! it is less than your poem is worth; and that idea is only surpassed in beauty by your elegy on the death of Muhammad Ibn Hamid At-'Tusi."

"Which," asked Abu Tammam, "does the Emir mean?"

"Why," said Abu Dolad, "your poem commencing thus: *Now let misfortune do its worst, and time inflict its evils! There is no excuse for eyes which have not shed their tears.* I wish, by Allah! that this elegy had been composed by you on me."

"Nay!" said the poet, "may I and my family die to save the Emir, and may I leave the world before you!"

To this Abu Dolad replied: "He whose death is deplored in verses like those is immortal."

Surely the palmy days of poetry have passed away. How one would like to think of Mr. Kipling, say, being summoned to Buckingham Palace to speak a piece and retiring with a cheque for £1025, which is what fifty thousand dirhems come to.

Gratitude, even when it is excessive, is always a good theme. In the following case the pro-

## A Boswell of Baghdad

portions were respected with more fitness. Al-Wazir Al-Muhallabi was both vizier and poet. He was also a very poor vegetarian, and once, on a journey, being unable to obtain flesh-food, he recited extempore these verses: *Where is death sold, that I may buy it? for this life is devoid of good. Oh! let death, whose taste to me is sweet, come and free me from a detested life! When I see a tomb from afar, I wish to be its inhabitant. May the Being who granteth tranquillity have compassion on the soul of the generous man who will bestow death, as a charity, upon one of his brethren!* These verses being heard by a person who was travelling in the same caravan with him, and whose name was Abd Allah As-Sufi (or, by another account, Abu 'l-Hasan Al-Askalani), he bought for Al-Muhallabi a dirhem's worth of meat, cooked it, and gave it to him to eat.

“They then,” says Ibn, “separated, and Al-Muhallabi having experienced a change of fortune, became vizier to Moizz Ad-Dawlat at Baghdad, while the person who had travelled with him and purchased the meat for him was reduced to poverty. Having then learned that Al-Muhallabi was a vizier, he set out to find him and wrote to

## A Vizier's Gratitude

him these lines: *Repeat to the vizier, for whose life I would sacrifice my own—repeat to him the words of one who reminds him of what he has forgotten. Do you remember when, in a life of misery, you said: 'Where is death sold, that I may buy it?' The vizier on reading the note recollected the circumstance, and, moved with the joy of doing a generous action, he ordered seven hundred dirhems to be given to the writer, and inscribed these words on the paper: 'The similitude of those who lay out their substance in the service of God is as a grain of corn which has produced seven ears and in every ear a hundred grains; for God giveth many-fold to whom He pleaseth. He then prayed God's blessing on him, and clothed him in a robe of honour, and appointed him to a place under government, so that'*—the corollary seems hardly worth adding—"he might live in easy circumstances."

Poetry was, you see, worth practising in Bagdad in those days; nor had the poets any shame in accepting presents. What princes liked to give it was not for poets to analyse or refuse. Al-Moizz Ibn Badis, sovereign of Ifrikya and the son of Badis, was a patron indeed, "Poets," says

## A Boswell of Baghdad

Ibn Khallikan, "were loud in his praise, literary men courted his patronage, and all who hoped for gain made his court their halting-place."

To the modern mind he was too easily pleased, if the following story is typical. He was sitting, one day, in his saloon with a number of literary men about him, when, noticing a lemon shaped like a hand and fingers, he asked them to extemporize some verses on that subject. Abd Abu Ali Al-Hasan Ibn Rashik Al-Kairawani at once recited the following lines: *A lemon, with its extremities spread out, appears before all eyes without being injured. It seems to hold out a hand towards the Creator, invoking long life to the son of Badis.*

Al-Moizz declared the verses excellent and showed more favour to the author than to any other literary man in the assembly.

Ready wit not less than poetical ingenuity could always win the respect of these gentlemen, whose cynical cold-bloodedness and implacability were ever ready to be diverted, provided that the diversion was intellectual. For instance, it is related that Al-Hajjaj said to the brother of Katari: "I shall surely put thee to death."



## Saif Ad-Dawlat the Lavish

“Why so?” replied the other.

“On account of thy brother’s revolt,” answered Al-Hajjaj.

“But I have a letter from the Commander of the Faithful, ordering thee not to punish me for the fault of my brother.”

“Produce it.”

“I have something stronger than that.”

“What is it?”

“The book of Almighty God, wherein He says : ‘And no burdened soul shall bear the burden of another.’”

Al-Hajjaj was struck with his answer, and gave him his liberty.

Among the lavish patrons of poets Saif Ad-Dawlat stands high. It is related that he was one day giving audience in the city of Aleppo, and poets were reciting verses in his praise, when an Arab of the desert, in squalid attire, stepped forward and repeated these lines: *My means are spent, but I have reached my journey’s end. This is the glory of all other cities, and thou, Emir! art the ornament whereby the Arabs surpass the rest of men. Fortune, thy slave, has wronged us; and to thee we have recourse against thy slave’s injustice.*

## A Boswell of Baghdad

“By Allah!” exclaimed the prince, “thou hast done it admirably.” He then ordered him a present of two hundred gold pieces.

Abu 'l-Kasim Othman Ibn Muhammad, a native of Irak and kadi of Ain Zerba, relates as follows: “I was at an audience given by Saif Ad-Dawlat at Aleppo, when the kadi Abu Nasr Muhammad Ibn Muhammad An-Naisapuri went up to him, and having drawn an empty purse and a roll of paper out of his sleeve, he asked and obtained permission to recite a poem which was written on the paper. He then commenced his kasada, the first line of which was: *Thy wonted generosity is still the same; thy power is uncontrolled, and thy servant stands in need of one thousand pieces of silver.*

“When the poet had finished, Saif Ad-Dawlat burst into a fit of laughter and ordered him a thousand pieces of gold, which were immediately put into the purse he had brought with him.”

Here is a delightful account of the relations between a crafty poet and a patron who was not wholly a fool. Abu Dulaf was a spirited, noble, and generous chief, highly extolled for his liberality, courage, and enterprise, noted for his vic-

## The Poet and the Sisters

stories and his beneficence. Men distinguished in literature and the sciences derived instruction from his discourse, and his talent was conspicuous even in the art of vocal music. His praises were celebrated in kasadas of the greatest beauty. Bakr Ibn An-Nattah said of him: *O thou who pursuest the study of alchemy, the great alchemy consists in praising the son of Isa. Was there but one dirhem in the world, thou wouldst obtain it by this means.*

It is stated that, for these two verses, Abu Dulaf gave Ibn An-Nattah ten thousand dirhems. The poet then ceased visiting him for some time and employed the money in the purchase of a village or estate on the river Obolla. He afterwards went to see him, and addressed him in these words: *Thanks to thee, I have purchased an estate on the Obolla, crowned by a pavilion erected in marble. It has a sister beside it which is now on sale, and you have always money to bestow.*

“How much,” said Abu Dulaf, “is the price of that sister?”

The poet answered: “Ten thousand dirhems.”

Abu Dulaf gave him the money, and said: “Recollect that the Obolla is a large river, with

## A Boswell of Baghdad

many estates situated on it, and that each of these sisters has another at her side; so, if thou openest such a door as that, it will lead to a breach between us. Be content with what thou hast now got, and let this be a point agreed on."

The poet then offered up prayers for his welfare and withdrew.

### VIII.—A BRAVE POET

The end of the munificent and splendid Ibn Bakiya was tragic, and it leads to so fine and characteristic a story that I must tell it here: partly in Ibn Khallikan's words and partly in my own. During the war which was carried on between the two cousins Izz Ad-Dawlat and Adud Ad-Dawlat, the former seized on Ibn Bakiya and, having deprived him of sight, delivered him over to Adud Ad-Dawlat. That prince caused him to be paraded about with a hood over his head, and then ordered him to be cast to the elephants. Those animals killed him, and his body was exposed on a cross at the gate called Bab At-Tak, near his own house.

On his crucifixion, an adl of Baghdad, called Abu 'l-Hasan Muhammad Ibn Omar Ibn Yakub

## The Noble Abu 'l-Hasan

Al-Anbari, deplored his fate in a beautiful poem, of which this is one line: *I never saw a tree, before this, enabled to sustain all that was generous.*

Abu 'l-Hasan, on composing his elegy, copied it out and threw it into one of the streets of Baghdad.

It fell into the hands of the literati, who passed it one to another, till Adud Ad-Dawlat was at length informed of its existence. He caused it to be recited in his presence, and, struck with admiration at its beauty, he exclaimed: "O that I were the person crucified, not he! Let the poet be brought to me!"

During a whole year strict search was made for the author, and the Sahib Ibn Abbad who was then at Rai, being informed of the circumstance, wrote out a letter of protection in favour of the poet. When Abu 'l-Hasan heard of this, he went to the court of the Sahib and was asked by him if it was he who had composed the verses. He replied in the affirmative, on which the Sahib expressed the desire to hear them from his own mouth. When Abu 'l-Hasan came to the verse, *I never saw a tree, before this, enabled to sustain all that was generous*, the Sahib rose up and

## A Boswell of Baghdad

embraced him, kissing him on the lips; he then sent him to Adud Ad-Dawlat.

When he appeared before Adud Ad-Dawlat, that prince said to him: "What motive could have induced thee to compose an elegy on the death of my enemy?"

Abu 'l-Hasan replied: "Former obligations and favours granted long since; my heart therefore overflowed with sorrow, and I lamented his fate."

There were wax-lights burning, at the time, before the prince, and this led him to say to the poet: "Canst thou recollect any verses on wax-lights?" and to this the other replied by the following lines: *The wax-lights, showing their ends tipped with fire, seemed like the fingers of thy trembling foes, humbly stretched forth to implore thy mercy.*

On hearing these verses, Adud Ad-Dawlat clothed him in a pelisse of honour and bestowed on him a horse and a bag of money.

### IX.—A WESTERN INTERLUDE

That beautiful phrase of the poet on his crucified hero—*I never saw a tree, before this,*

## The Brothers Bonvin

*enabled to sustain all that was generous*—has an oddly close parallel, which I am tempted to record here: a phrase, not less beautiful, used by a modern Frenchman, also of a dead man and a tree. It occurs in a letter written by François Bonvin on the death of his brother, Léon, the painter of flowers. Léon Bonvin's work is little known and there is little of it, but those who possess examples treasure them like black pearls. François Bonvin, who is represented in the National Gallery, in the modern French and Dutch room, by a scene of cattle painted with great decision and confidence and breadth, and who died in 1888, was the son of a policeman at Vaugiraud, on the outskirts of Paris: an old soldier who divided his time between protecting the property of the market gardeners and constructing rockeries for poor people's windows. Another, and the youngest son, was Léon, who after a shy and lonely boyhood and youth, under the tyranny of his father, which was mitigated by rambles in the neighbouring forest of Meudon, gathering flowers and painting them under his brother's encouragement with a felicity and fidelity that have not been surpassed, fell, when

## A Boswell of Baghdad

still quite young, into the hands of a shrewish vulgar wife, and with her opened a tavern. No couple could be more ill-assorted than this gentle creature, full of poetry and feeling, whose one ambition was to set exquisitely on paper the blossoms which gave him pleasure, and the noisy, bustling, angry woman whom he had married.

The union and the commercial venture were alike disastrous; unhappiness was accompanied by poverty, and after a short period of depression the unfortunate artist, early one morning, in his thirty-third year, wandered into the forest of Meudon, where the world had once spread so happily before his eyes, and hanged himself.

All this happened in the middle years of the last century, when the same revival of nature-worship was inspiring painters in France as had, fifty years earlier, flushed Wordsworth's poetry, and such famous and more fortunate contemporaries of Léon Bonvin as Corot and Rousseau and Millet and Daubigny and Jacque and Dupré were painting in the forest of Fontainebleau. Theirs to succeed; poor Léon found life too hard, and was dead when still far from his prime.



## The Crown of Gentleness

And what of the notable phrase? It is one that I know I shall never forget, one that will remain indissolubly linked to the name of Bonvin, whether it is Léon who inspired it or François who penned it and who had been so useful in providing his brother with the materials for his one absorbing pleasure and had always exhorted him to "do everything from nature." Writing to some one of influence in Paris, François told the story of his brother's death. In a postscript he added the information that the weight of Léon's body had broken a branch of the tree. Then came the words: "This is the only damage he ever did."

Could there be a more beautiful epitaph or a more poignant commentary on a world askew?

### X.—PERSIAN HUMOUR

Persian humour is a stealthier thing than English humour. We like to laugh; the sudden surprise pleases us. But these old ruminative observers of life, even if they rapped out a sarcasm now and then, were normally happiest when their fancy was playing quietly around an

## A Boswell of Baghdad

idea: fetching similes for it from every quarter and accumulating extravagances. Thus: "It is related by Abu 'l-Khattab Ibn Aun Al-Hariri, the poet and grammarian, that he went one day to visit An-Nami, and found him seated. His hair was white like the Thaghama when in flower, but one single black hair still remained.

"'Sir!' said Ibn Aun, 'there is a black hair in your head.'

"'Yes,' replied An-Nami, 'it is the sole remnant of my youth, and I am pleased with it; I have even written verses on it.'

"Then, at the request of Ibn Aun, he recited these lines: *In that head a single hair still appeared, preserving its blackness; 'twas a sight which rejoiced the eyes of my friends. I said to my white hairs, which had put it in fear: 'I implore you! respect it as a stranger. A dark African spouse will not long remain in the house where the second wife is white of skin.'*"

One of the worthiest representatives of the humorists of the book is Abu Dulama, a black Abyssinian, whose wits never failed him. Here is the poem which he recited when ordered by Ruh, the governor of Basra, to attack one of the

## Cowardice with Honour

enemy single-handed: *I fly to Ruh for refuge; let him not send me to a combat in which I shall bring disgrace upon the tribe of Asad. Your father Al-Muhallab left you as a legacy the love of death; but such a legacy as that I have inherited from none. And this I know well, that the act of drawing near to enemies produces a separation between souls and bodies.*

Ruh positively declared, however, that Abu Dulama should go forth and fight, enforcing the command with the pertinent question, "Why do you receive pay from the sultan?"

"To fight for him," replied Abu.

"Then," said Ruh, "why not go forth and attack that enemy of God?"

"If I go forth to him, O Emir," replied the Abyssinian, "I shall be sent to join those who are dead and gone; and the condition I made with the sultan was, to fight for him, but not to die for him."

Another wit, Osama Ibn Murshid, having had a tooth drawn, produced the following verses, either at the time, for the delectation of the dentist, or afterwards, when seated among his friends: *I had a companion of whom I was never*

## A Boswell of Baghdad

*tired, who suffered in my service, and laboured with assiduity; whilst we were together I never saw him; and when he appeared before my eyes, we had parted for ever.*

This is how Osama wrote when the house of a miser was burnt down: *See how the progress of time constrains us to acknowledge that there is a destiny. Ibn Talib never lit a fire in his house, through avarice, yet by fire it was destroyed.*

“One thing,” says Ibn Khallikan, in the notice of this satirist, “brings on another.” He then proceeds: “Abu ’l-Hasan Yahya Abd Al-Azim Al-Misri, surnamed Al-Jazzar, recited to me the following verses which he had composed on another literary man at Cairo, far advanced in age, who, being attacked by a cutaneous eruption, anointed himself with sulphur: *O, learned master, hearken to the demand of a friend devoid of sarcasm: thou art old, and of course art near to the fire of hell; why then anoint thyself with sulphur?*”

As a further quite unnecessary proof of the antiquity of jests which we think new, I might append to this excellent sarcasm by a friend devoid of sarcasm the story, often now told, of

## The West Intervenes

the rival chemists in a provincial town, one of whom was old-fashioned and costly, and the other new and cheap. To the costly one, who had asked too much for sulphur, a customer remarked that if he went to the new shop opposite he could get it for fourpence; which brought from the old-fashioned chemist, weary of this competition, the admirable retort that if he went still farther, to a certain place, he would get it for nothing.

East and West join hands again. When I was a boy living in a town by the sea, one of my heroes in real life—whom I never knew, but admired fearfully from a distance—was a famous stockbroker, whose splendid name I could give if I chose. One of his many mansions was here, and I used to see him often as he managed the finest pair of horses on the south coast, which he drove in a phaeton with red wheels, always smoking a cigar as he did so. Many were the stories told of his princely Victor Radnor-ish ways, one of which credited him with a private compartment on the train, into which his guests walked without a ticket—a magnificent idea!—and another stated that he bought his trousers

## A Boswell of Baghdad

a hundred pairs at a time. And then I open this book and read that Barjawan, an Ethiopian eunuch, after being stabbed to death by the prince's umbrella-bearer, was found to possess a thousand pairs of trousers.

Not a little of the humorous effect of these Persian sayings comes from their dry frankness. For example: Ibn Omair, a trustworthy traditionist, when, once, he was ill, and a person sent his excuses for not going to visit him, answered: "I cannot reproach a person for not visiting me, whom I myself should not go to visit were he sick." Modern would-be wits might take the hint; for with candour so scarce, and self-criticism usually ending in a verdict of complete innocence, the blurted naked truth, not unaccompanied by a sidelong thrust at the speaker's own fallibility, would always produce the required laugh.

### XI.—THE SATIRISTS

Al-Yazidi, a story of whom I quoted above, was a teacher of Koranic readings, a grammarian and a philologist, who taught in Baghdad in the ninth century. He was also a famous satirist;

## “Most Sarcastic Men”

but satire seems to have been easier then than now. So at least I gather from the epigram which Al-Yazidi wrote upon Al-Asmai Al-Bahili: *You who pretend to draw your origin from Asma, tell me how you are connected with that noble race. Are you not a man whose genealogy, if verified, proves that you descend from Bahila?* “This last verse,” said Ibn Al-Munajjim, “is one of the most satirical which have been composed by the later poets.”

I need hardly say that Ibn Khallikan, with his eagle eye and fierce memory, does not let the originality of this pass unchallenged. The idea, he tells us, is borrowed from the verse in which Hammad Ajrad attacked Bashshar, the son of Burd. I like its directness. *You call yourself the son of Burd, though you are the son of another man. Or, grant that Burd married your mother, who was Burd?*

In sarcasms Al-Yazidi was hard pressed by Abu Obaida, who was a very Mr. Brown (*vide* Bret Harte) in being of “so sarcastic a humour that every one in Basra who had a reputation to maintain was obliged to flatter him.” When dining once with Musa Ibn Ar-Rahman Al-Hilali,

## A Boswell of Baghdad

one of the pages spilled some gravy on the skirt of Abu Obaida's cloak.

"Some gravy has fallen on your cloak," said Musa, "but I shall give you ten others in place of it."

"Nay!" replied Abu Obaida, "do not mind! *Your* gravy can do no harm."

Another of Al-Yazidi's satirical efforts, which has no forerunner in Ibn Khallikan's recollection, is this, levelled at another mean acquaintance; meanness, indeed, being one of the unpardonable offences—especially in the eyes of poets who lived on patronage: *Be careful not to lose the friendship of Abu 'l-Mukatil when you approach to partake of his meal. Breaking his crumpet is for him as bad as breaking one of his limbs. His guests fast against their will, and without meaning to obtain the spiritual reward which is granted to fasting.*

Apropos of sarcasm, the Merwanide Omaiyyide, who reigned in Spain, received from Nizar, the sovereign of Egypt, an insulting and satirical letter, to which he replied in these terms: "You satirize us because you have heard of us. Had we ever heard of you, we should make you a reply."



## A Blind Sardonyx

None of the sarcastic wits are more pointed than the blind mawla Abu 'l-Aina (806-96), whose tongue was venomously barbed, and who, like other blind men, often used his malady as a protection when his satire had been excessive. Viziers were his favourite butts. Being one day in the society of one of them, the conversation turned on the history of the Barmekides and their generosity, on which the vizier said to Abu 'l-Aina, who had just made a high eulogium of that family for their liberality and bounty: "You have praised them and their qualities too much; all this is a mere fabrication of book-makers and a fable imagined by authors."

Abu 'l-Aina immediately replied: "And why then do book-makers not relate such fables of you, O vizier?"

Again, having gone one day to the door of Said Ibn Makhlad and asked permission to enter, Abu 'l-Aina was told that the vizier was engaged in prayer. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "there is a pleasure in novelty."

"I am told," said a khalif to him, "that thou hast an evil tongue."

## A Boswell of Baghdad

“Commander of the Faithful!” replied Abu ’l-Aina, “the Almighty himself has spoken praise and satire,” and he then quoted this poem: *If I praise not the honest man and revile not the sordid, the despicable, and the base, why should I have the power of saying, “That is good and this is bad” ? And why should God have opened men’s ears and my mouth ?*

Having one day a dispute with a descendant of the Prophet, his adversary said to Abu ’l-Aina: “You attack me, and yet you say in your prayers: ‘Almighty God! bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad.’”

“Yes,” replied Abu ’l-Aina, “but I add—‘who are virtuous and pure.’”

Here is one of the stories which Abu ’l-Aina used to tell. “I was one day sitting with Abu ’l-Jahm, when a man came in and said to him: ‘You made me a promise, and it depends on your kindness to fulfil it.’

“Abu ’l-Jahm answered that he did not recollect it, and the other replied: ‘If you do not recollect it, ’tis because the persons like me to whom you make promises are numerous; and if I remember it, ’tis because the persons like

## The Blind Poet of Egypt

you to whom I may confidently address a request are few.'

"'Well said! Blessings on your father!' exclaimed Abu 'l-Jahm, and the promise was immediately fulfilled."

That blind men should be self-protective is of course, natural, and the East has always been rich in them. "The learned Muwaffak Ad-Din Muzaffar, the blind poet of Egypt, having gone to visit Al-Kadi As-Said Ibn Sana Al-Mulk, the latter said to him: 'Learned scholar! I have composed the first hemistich of a verse, but cannot finish it, although it has occupied my mind for some days.'

"Muzaffar asked to hear what he had composed, and the other recited as follows: *The whiteness of my beard proceeds from the blackness of her ringlets—*

"On hearing these words, Muzaffar replied that he had found their completion, and recited as follows:—*even as the flame with which I burn for her acquired its intensity from her pomegranate-flower [her rosy cheeks].*

"As-Said approved of the addition, and commenced another verse on the same model; but

## A Boswell of Baghdad

Muzaffar said to himself: 'I must rise and be off, or else he will make the entire piece at the expense of my wits.' "

### XII.—AN EARLY CHESS CHAMPION

Much has been written of the origin of chess, and many countries contend for the honour of its inception. According to my encyclopædia, China, India, Persia, and Egypt have each a claim, but it is probable that the game existed, in some form or other, before history. The theory is that the Arabs introduced it to Europe in the eighth century. Thus the cautious encyclopædia; but Ibn Khallikan has no such hesitancy. From him we get names and dates. Ibn Khallikan gives the credit boldly to one Sissah, who, says he, "imagined the game for the amusement of King Shihram." Whether Sissah built it out of a clear sky, or had foundations on which to erect, is not stated. Anyway, the pastime was a complete success. "It is said that, when Sissah invented the game of chess and presented it to Shihram, the latter was struck with admiration and filled with joy;

## An Inventor's Reward

he ordered chess-boards to be placed in the temples, and considered that game as the best thing that could be learned, inasmuch as it served as an introduction to the art of war, as an honour to religion and the world, and as the foundation of all justice.

“He manifested also his gratitude and satisfaction for the favour which Heaven had granted him in illustrating his reign by such an invention, and he said to Sissah, ‘Ask me for whatever you desire.’

“‘I then demand,’ replied Sissah, ‘that a grain of wheat be placed in the first square of the chess-board, two in the second, and that the number of grains be progressively doubled till the last square is attained: whatever this quantity may be, I ask you to bestow it on me.’

“The king, who meant to make him a present of something considerable, exclaimed that such a recompense would be too little, and reproached Sissah for asking for so inadequate a reward.

“Sissah declared that he desired nothing but what he had mentioned, and, heedless of the king's remonstrances, he persisted in his demand.

“The king, at length, consented, and ordered

## A Boswell of Baghdad

that quantity of wheat to be given him. When the chiefs of the government office received orders to that effect, they calculated the amount, and answered that they did not possess near so much wheat as was required.

“These words were reported to the king, and he, being unable to credit them, ordered the chiefs to be brought before him. Having questioned them on the subject, they replied that all the wheat in the world would be insufficient to make up the quantity. He ordered them to prove what they said, and, by a series of multiplications and reckonings, they demonstrated to him that such was the fact.

“On this, the king said to Sissah: ‘Your ingenuity in imagining such a request is yet more admirable than your talent in inventing the game of chess.’”

Ibn Khallikan was at pains to investigate the matter. Having, he says, “met one of the accountants employed at Alexandria, I received from him a demonstration which convinced me that the declaration was true. He placed before me a sheet of paper in which he had doubled the numbers up to the sixteenth square, and obtained

## An Arithmetical Nightmare

thirty-two thousand seven hundred and sixty-eight grains. 'Now,' said he, 'let us consider this quantity to be the contents of a pint measure, and this I know by experiment to be true'—these are the accountant's words, so let him bear the responsibility—'then let the pint be doubled in the seventeenth square, and so on progressively. In the twentieth square it will become a waiba (peck), the waibas will then become an irdabb (bushel), and in the fortieth square we shall have one hundred and seventy-four thousand seven hundred and sixty-two irdabbs. Let us suppose this to be the contents of a corn store, and no corn store contains more than that; then in the fiftieth square we shall have the contents of one thousand and twenty-four stores; suppose these to be situated in one city—and no city can have more than that number of stores or even so many—we shall then find that the sixty-fourth and last square gives sixteen thousand three hundred and eighty-four cities. Now, you know that there is not in the world a greater number of cities than that, for geometry informs us that the circumference of the globe is eight thousand parasangs; so that,

## A Boswell of Baghdad

if the end of a cord were laid on any part of the earth, and the cord passed round it till both ends met, we should find the length of the cord to be twenty-four thousand miles, which is equal to eight thousand parasangs.' This demonstration is decisive and indubitable."

Of Sissah I know no more, except that he was from India and that his game became popular. Up to the time of Ibn Khallikan, in the thirteenth century, its best player was one As-Suli, famous as an author and a convivialist, who died one hundred and twenty years before the Norman Conquest. "To play like As-Suli" was indeed a proverb. Among this proficient's friends was his pupil, the khalif Ar-Radi, who had the greatest admiration for As-Suli's genius. One day, for instance, walking with some boon companions through a garden filled with beautiful flowers, Ar-Radi asked them if they ever saw a finer sight. To this they replied, speaking as wise men speak to autocratic rulers, that nothing on earth could surpass it.

The retort of the khalif must have given them the surprise of their lives. "You are wrong," said he: "As-Suli's manner of playing chess is



## The Finest Sights

yet a finer sight, and surpasses all you could describe!" So might we now refer to Hobbs on his day at the Oval, on a hard wicket, against fast bowling, with Surrey partisans standing four deep behind the seats, or to Stevenson nursing the balls from the middle pocket to the top left-hand pocket and then across to the right.

One more anecdote of the Persian Steinitz, and I have done. I tell it because it rounds off this interlude with some symmetry by bringing us back to my own consultation of the encyclopædia at the beginning of it. As-Suli had a famous library of books in which he had jotted down the fruits of his various reading. When asked a question on any subject, instead of answering it he would tell his boy to bring such and such a volume in which the matter at issue was treated. This trait led to an epigram being written upon him by a rival scholar, Abu Said, to the effect that "of all men As-Suli possessed most learning—in his library." There are still men learned on the same terms, but, nowadays, we do not have to collect the information for ourselves but go to *The Times* and Messrs. Chambers for it.

## A Boswell of Baghdad

### XIII.—COURTESY AND JUSTICE

Harun Ar-Raschid passing near Manbij with Abd Al-Malik Ibn Salih, who was the most elegant speaker of all the surviving descendants of Al-Abbas, observed a well-built country-seat and a garden full of trees covered with fruit, and asked to whom that property belonged.

Abd Al-Malik replied: "To you, Commander of the Faithful! and then to me."

This Abd Al-Malik was so famous as a storyteller that a wise man said of him: "When I reflect that Abd Al-Malik's tongue must sooner or later moulder into dust, the world loses its value in my sight."

Abu 'l-Amaithal, the poet, was also a most efficient courtier. As he kissed one day the hand of Abd Allah Ibn Tahir, that prince complained of the roughness of the poet's moustachios, whereupon he immediately observed that the spines of the hedgehog could not hurt the wrist of the lion. Abd Allah was so pleased with this compliment that he ordered him a valuable present.

Another graceful compliment. Of Ishak Ibn

## A School's Sacrifice

Ibrahim Al-Mausili, who was famous for his voice and was a "constant companion of the khalifs in their parties of pleasure," the khalif Al-Motasim charmingly said: "Ishak never yet sang without my feeling as if my possessions were increased."

Another compliment that goes still deeper. Abu Nuwas, in a lament composed on the death of the khalif Al-Amin, said of him: *His death was the only thing I feared, and now nothing remains for me to dread.*

These, however, were but speeches. Compliments may be conveyed also by deeds, as we find in the case of Imam Al-Haramain, who was so learned and acceptable a teacher that, at the moment of his death, his scholars, who were four hundred and one in number, broke their pens and inkhorns; and they let a full year pass over before they resumed their studies. Of these Persians we can believe in the sincerity; but the motives of English scholars performing a similar act of renunciation might be open to suspicion.

Badi Az-Zaman Al-Hamadani was famous for his epistolary style. Here is a passage which, though written in Persia in the tenth century, might have aptness in English country houses at this

## A Boswell of Baghdad

moment: *When water has long remained at rest, its noxious qualities appear; and when its surface has continued tranquil, its foulness gets into motion. Thus it is with a guest: his presence is displeasing when his stay has been protracted, and his shadow is oppressive when the time for which he should sojourn is at an end. Adieu.*

The khalif Ali Ibn Ali Talib was a very just man. Some one having committed a theft was brought before him. "Bring me witnesses," said Ali, "to prove that he purloined the object out of the saddle-bag."

Unmistakable evidence to that effect being given, Ali immediately ordered the fingers of his hand to be cut off.

On this some person said to him: "Commander of the Faithful! why not cut it off by the wrist?"

"God forbid!" exclaimed the khalif; "how could he then lean on his staff? How could he pray? How could he eat?"

In the Life of Ibn Abd Al-Barr, a Traditionist of Cordova, who, "it is stated, died in the year 380 (A.D. 990), but God knows best," a number of good stories are collected. This is one. "It is related that, when Adam was sent out of

## Adam's Choice

Paradise and down to earth by Almighty God, the angel Gabriel went to him and said: 'O Adam! God here sends you three qualities, so that you may select one of them for yourself and leave the two others.'

"'What are they?' said Adam.

"Gabriel replied: 'Modesty, Piety, and Intelligence.'

"'I choose Intelligence,' said Adam.

"The angel then told Modesty and Piety to return to Heaven, because Adam had made choice of Intelligence.

"They answered: 'We will not return.'

"'How!' said he. 'Do you mean to disobey me?'

"They replied: 'We do not, but our orders were, never to quit Intelligence wherever she might be.'"

Another story showing how destructively effective may be the use of fairness—politeness with the buttons off—is of an Arab who, on being insulted copiously by a stranger, remained silent. To the question why he did not reply, he said: "I know not the man's vices and am unwilling to reproach him with defects he may not have."

## A Boswell of Baghdad

Two other anecdotes are of the famous jester, Al-Jammaz. The first tells how at Basra a man perceiving the new moon, which indicated the beginning of the month of fasting, Ramadan, pointed it out eagerly to his companions. "When the moon which indicates the end of the fast was nearly due, Al-Jammaz knocked at the door of this too officious person and said: 'Come! get up and take us out of the scrape into which you brought us.'"

Al-Jammaz was delighted with the following example of his readiness. "One rainy morning," he said, "I was asked by my wife what was best to be done on such a day as that, and I answered: 'Divorcing a troublesome wife.' This stopped her mouth."

Al-Mubarrad used frequently to recite these lines at his assemblies: *O you who, in sumptuous array, strut about like princes and scorn the hatred of the poor, know that the saddle-cloth changeth not the nature of the ass, neither do splendid trappings change the nature of the pack horse.*

When Al-Mubarrad died a poet wrote of him: *Behold the mansion of literature half-demolished, and destruction awaiting the remainder.* That was in 899.

## Old Age

To excuse himself for a want of social ceremony, Ibn Abi 's-Sakr, "an amateur of the belles-lettres," who died in 1105, composed these verses: *An indisposition called eighty years hinders me from rising to receive my friends; but when they reach an advanced age, they will understand and accept my excuse.*

Old age occurs also in a poem of Al-Otbi, who died in 842: *When Sulaima saw me turn my eyes away—and I turn my glances away from all who resemble her—she said: "I saw thee mad with love"; and I replied: "Youth is a madness of which old age is the cure."* This phrase, says Ibn Khallikan, afterwards became a proverb. Most nations have anecdotes in which the idea occurs.

The following anecdote of the kadi Shuraih, who was famous not only for his "great skill in distinguishing right from wrong" but also for his humour, is very pleasing. Adi Ibn Artā, who was blind, went to the kadi's house one day, and the following dialogue ensued:

"Where are you, kadi? May God direct you!"

"I am between you and the wall."

## A Boswell of Baghdad

“Listen to me.”

“I can hear very well.”

“I am a native of Syria.”

“It is a distant land.”

“And I have married a wife from your country.”

“May you live happily and have many children!”

“And I wanted to take her on a journey.”

“Each man has the best right over his own family.”

“But I engaged not to remove her from her native place.”

“Engagements are binding.”

“Judge then between us.”

“I have already done so.”

“And against whom have you given it?”

“Against your mother’s son.”

“On whose evidence?”

“On the evidence of your maternal aunt’s sister’s son.”

I find a similar quality—not un-Johnsonian—in the reply of At-Tirmidi the juriconsult to a question, as reported by Abu ’t-Taiyib Ahmad Ibn Othman As-Simsar. “I was,” said he, “at



## Forerunners of The Doctor

Abu Jaafar At-Tirmidi's when a person consulted him about the saying of the Prophet, that God descended to the heaven of the world (i.e. the lowest of the seven heavens). This person expressed his desire to know how there could, in that case, be anything more exalted than the lowest heaven?

“At-Tirmidi replied: ‘The descent is intelligible; the manner how is unknown; the belief therein is obligatory; and the asking about it is a blameable innovation.’”

The kadi Yahya Ibn Aktham, although famous for his licentiousness, was orthodox to the marrow. It was he who said: “The *Koran* is the word of God, and whoever says that it has been created by man should be invited to abandon that opinion; and if he do not, his head should be struck off.”

The following dialogue between Yahya and a man is very characteristic of dry Persian sagacity. The man began it, thus: “May God preserve you! How much should I eat?”

Yahya replied: “Enough to get over hunger and not enough to attain satiety.”

“How long may I laugh?”

## A Boswell of Baghdad

“Till your face brightens, but without raising your voice.”

“How long should I weep?”

“Weeping should never fatigue you, if it be through fear of God.”

“What actions of mine should I conceal?”

“As many as you can.”

“What are the actions which I should do openly?”

“Those which may serve as examples to good and virtuous men, whilst they secure you from public reprobation.”

On this the man exclaimed: “May God preserve us from words which abide when deeds have passed away!” It is possible that there were reserves of meaning in this final speech, for Yahya’s surname Aktham signifies either “a corpulent man” or “sated with food.”

I have not borrowed much from Ibn Khallikan’s heroics, but this is good. Al-Moizz having conquered Egypt, he entered Old Cairo. His pretensions to be a descendant of Ali had already been contested, and on his approach the people of the city went forth to meet him, accompanied by a band of sharifs, and Ibn Tabataba, who was

## A Conqueror's Genealogy

one of the number, asked him from whom he drew his descent.

To this question Al-Moizz replied: "We shall hold a sitting to which all of you shall be convened, and there we shall expose to you the entire chain of our genealogy."

Being at length established in the castle of Cairo, he gave a public audience, as he had promised, and having taken his seat, he asked if any of their chiefs were still alive?

"No," replied they, "not one of any consequence survives."

He then drew his sword half-way out of the scabbard and exclaimed: "This is my genealogy! And here," said he, scattering a great quantity of gold among them, "are proofs of my nobility!"

On this they all acknowledged him for their lord and master.

### XIV.—THE ASCETICS

Of Bishr Ibn Al-Harith Al-Hafi, one of Baghdad's holiest ascetics, it is told that his choice of the life of saintliness thus came about. Happening to find on the road a leaf of paper with the name

## A Boswell of Baghdad

of God written on it, which had been trampled underfoot, he bought ghaliya with some dirhems which he had about him, and, having perfumed the leaf with it, deposited it in a hole in a wall.

Afterwards he had a dream, in which a voice seemed to say to him: "O Bishr! thou hast perfumed my name, and I shall surely cause thine to be a sweet odour both in this world and the next."

When he awoke, he gave up the world, and turned to God.

Bishr being once asked with what sauce he ate his bread, replied: "I think on good health, and I take that as my sauce."

One of his prayers was this: "O, my God! deprive me of notoriety, if thou hast given it to me in this world for the purpose of putting me to shame in the next."

It was a true saying of another famous ascetic, Al-Fudail, that, when God loves a man, He increases his afflictions, and when He hates a man, He increases his worldly prosperity.

Asceticism, however, had not robbed him of human sympathy or warped his nature, for he said at another time: "For a man to be polite to

## The Wisdom of the Good

his company and make himself agreeable to them is better than to pass nights in prayer and days in fasting.”

Abu Ali Ar-Razi said: “I kept company with Al-Fudail during thirty years, and I never saw him laugh or smile but on one occasion, and that was the death of his son. On my asking him the reason, he replied: ‘Whatever is pleasing to God is pleasing to me.’”

Maruf Al-Karkhi, another celebrated saint, who died in Baghdad in 805, had a sensible elasticity. Passing, one day, by a water-carrier who was crying out: “God have mercy on him who drinketh!” he went up to him and took a drink, although he was at that time keeping a strict fast.

Some one, horrified at the impiety, said to him: “Art thou not keeping a fast?”

He replied: “Yes, I am, but I hoped for the fulfilment of that man’s prayer.”

One of the sayings of Abd Al-Ala, a man of holy life, was this: “Buying what one does not require, is selling what one requires.”

Another pious man, Abu Othman Al-Mazini the grammarian, used to tell the following story

## A Boswell of Baghdad

against himself: "There was a person who, for a long time, studied under me the grammar of Sibawaih, and who said to me, when he got to the end of the book, 'May God requite you well! As for me, I have not understood a letter of it.'"

Yahya, a celebrated preacher, on being asked by a descendant of the Prophet, "Tell me, Master! and may God assist you! what is your opinion of us who are the people of the house,"—that is to say, the members of Muhammad's family,—replied: "It is that which I would say of clay kneaded with the water of divine revelation and sprinkled with the water of the heavenly mission: can it give out any other odour than the musk of true direction and the ambergris of piety?"

The Alide was so highly pleased with this answer that he filled Yahya's mouth with pearls.

Yahya, who died on March 30, 872, had a very graceful turn for apophthegms. "True friendship," said he, "cannot be augmented by kindness nor diminished by unkindness." And again, he said: "To him who is going to see a true friend the way never appears long; he who

## In Praise of Friendship

goes to visit his beloved never feels lonely on the road."

The exaltation of friendship is indeed one of the beautiful things about this book. And the reader can never have too much of it. Buri Taj Al-Muluk was, says Ibn Khallikan, merely a man of talent, but the following verse by him contains a perfectly splendid compliment: *My friend approached from the west, riding on a grey horse, and I exclaimed: "Glory to the Almighty! the sun has risen in the west!"*

At-Tihami, the poet, one of whose poems, an elegy on the death of his son, brings ill-luck when quoted, wrote these admirable lines on the same theme: *In the company of noble-minded men there is always room for another. Friendship, it is true, renders difficulties easy: a house may be too small for eight persons, yet friendship will make it hold a ninth.*

### XV.—A NIGHT SCENE

The capriciousness of the moods of these sombre and terrible Eastern autocrats—the strange sentimental chinks in their armour—are seen in the

## A Boswell of Baghdad

very characteristic story which follows. "Secret information having been given to Al-Mutawakkil that the imam, Abu 'l-Hasan Al-Askari, had a quantity of arms, books, and other objects for the use of his followers concealed in his house, and being induced by malicious reports to believe that he aspired to the empire, he sent one night some soldiers of the Turkish guard to break in on him when he least expected such a visit.

"They found him quite alone and locked up in his room, clothed in a hair-shirt, his head covered with a woollen cloak, and turned with his face in the direction of Mecca, chanting, in this attitude, some verses of the *Koran* expressive of God's promises and threats, and having no other carpet between him and the earth than sand and gravel.

"He was carried off in that attire and brought, in the depth of the night, before Al-Mutawakkil, who was then engaged in drinking wine. On seeing him, the khalif received him with respect, and being informed that nothing had been found in his house to justify the suspicions cast upon him, he seated him by his side and offered him the goblet which he held in his hand.

"'Commander of the Faithful!' said Abu



## Suspect and Tyrant

'l-Hasan, 'a liquor such as that was never yet combined with my flesh and blood ; dispense me therefore from taking it.'

"The khalif acceded to his request, and then asked him to repeat some verses which might amuse him.

"Abu 'l-Hasan replied that he knew by heart very little poetry ; but Al-Mutawakkil having insisted, he recited these lines (which anticipate Poe's "Conqueror Worm" very thoroughly): '*They passed the night on the summits of the mountains, protected by valiant warriors ; but their place of refuge availed them not. After all their pomp und power, they had to descend from their lofty fortresses to the custody of the tomb. O what a dreadful change ! Their graves had already received them when a voice was heard exclaiming : "Where are the thrones, the crowns, and the robes of state ? Where are now the faces once so delicate, which were shaded by veils and protected by the curtains of the audience-hall ?"*' To this demand, the tomb gave answer sufficient : "*The worms,*" it said, "*are now revelling upon those faces ; long had these men been eating and drinking, but now they are eaten in their turn.*"'

"Every person present was filled with ap-

## A Boswell of Baghdad

prehension for Abu 'l-Hasan Ali's safety; they feared that Al-Mutawakkil, in the first burst of indignation, would have vented his wrath upon him; but they perceived the khalif weeping bitterly, the tears trickling down his beard, and all the assembly wept with him.

“Al-Mutawakkil then ordered the wine to be removed, after which he said: ‘Tell me, Abu 'l-Hasan! are you in debt?’

“‘Yes,’ replied the other, ‘I owe four thousand dinars.’

“The khalif ordered that sum to be given him, and sent him home with marks of the highest respect.”

### XVI.—THE FAIR

The book contains the lives of very few women; but one of the privileged of her sex is Buran, who died in 884. She became the wife of the khalif Al-Mamun, who, says Ibn Khallikan rather ungallantly, was “induced to marry her by the high esteem he bore her father.” That her father, the vizier, saw no slight in this, but was not unwilling that his daughter should pass under the roof of another, we may perhaps gather from the lavish-

## Wedding Festivities

ness of the wedding, which was celebrated at Fam As-Silh, with festivities and rejoicings, the like of which were never witnessed for ages before. The vizier's liberality went so far that he showered balls of musk upon the Hashimites, the commanders of the troops, the katibs, and the persons who held an eminent rank at court. Musk is an expensive thing in itself, but each of these balls contained a ticket, and the person into whose hands it fell, having opened it and read its contents, proceeded to an agent specially appointed for the purpose, from whom he received the object inscribed on the ticket, whether it was a farm or other property, a horse, a slave-girl, or a mameluk. The vizier then scattered gold and silver coins and eggs of amber among the rest of the people.

Capricious generosity marked many of these rulers. Thus it is told of Ibn Bakiya, the vizier, that in the space of twenty days he distributed twenty thousand robes of honour. "I saw him one night at a drinking party," says Abu Ishak As-Sabi, "and, during the festivity, he changed frequently his outer dress according to custom: every time he put on a new pelisse, he bestowed

## A Boswell of Baghdad

it on one or other of the persons present ; so that he gave away, in that sitting, upwards of two hundred pelisses.

“ A female musician then said to him : ‘ Lord of viziers ! there must be wasps in these robes to prevent you from keeping them on your body ! ’

“ He laughed at this conceit, and ordered her a present of a casket of jewels.”

Another of the ladies whom Ibn Khallikan so seldom leaves his high road to notice is As-Saiyida Sukaina, who, however, could not well be excluded, since she was “ the first among the women of her time [she died A.D. 735] by birth, beauty, wit, and virtue.” Part of her fame rests upon her repartees to poets : a most desirable form of activity. Thus, Orwa had a brother called Abu Bakr, whose death he lamented in some extravagant verses of which these are the concluding lines : *My sorrow is for Bakr, my brother ! Bakr has departed from me ! What life can now be pleasing after the loss of Bakr ?*

When Sukaina heard these verses, she asked who was Bakr ? And on being informed, she exclaimed : “ What ! that little blackamoor who used to run past us ? Why, everything is pleasing

## Slave-girl as Critic

after the loss of Bakr, even the common necessities of life—bread and oil !”

Another female intruder. It is told of Ibn As-Sammak, a pious sage and “professional relater of anecdotes,” that having held a discourse one day in the hearing of his slave-girl, he asked her what she thought of it. She replied that it would have been good but for the repetitions.

“But,” said he, “I employ repetitions in order to make those understand who do not.”

“Yes,” she replied, “and to make those understand who do not, you weary those who do.”

One of the sayings of Ibn As-Sammak was : “Fear God as if you had never obeyed Him, and hope in Him as if you had never disobeyed Him.”

## XVII.—THE GREAT JAAFAR

The father of the great Jaafar was Yahya the Baruekide, the friend and vizier of Harun Ar-Raschid. From this family Ibn Khallikan claimed descent. Yahya was “highly distinguished for wisdom, nobleness of mind, and elegance of language.” One of his sayings was this : “Three

## A Boswell of Baghdad

things indicate the degree of intelligence possessed by him who does them: the bestowing of gifts, the drawing up of letters, and the acting as ambassador.”

Another: “Spend when Fortune turns toward you, for her bounty cannot then be exhausted; spend when she turns away, for she will not remain with you.”

He said also, very comfortingly: “The sincere intention of doing a good action and a legitimate excuse for not doing it are equivalent to its accomplishment.”

He died in 805, after long imprisonment by the illustrious khalif whose pleasure it had been to address him always as “My father.”

Such was Jaafar’s parent. One of the greatest men in the whole work is Jaafar himself, called Jaafar the Barmekide, also vizier to Harun Ar-Raschid. Of his somewhat sardonic shrewdness this is a good example. Having learned that Ar-Raschid was much depressed in consequence of a Jewish astrologer having predicted to him that he would die within a year, he interviewed the Jew, who had been detained as a prisoner by the khalif’s orders.

## The Wisdom of Jaafar

Jaafar addressed him in these terms: "You pretend that the khalif is to die in the space of so many days?"

"Yes," said the Jew.

"And how long are you yourself to live?" said Jaafar.

"So many years," replied the other, mentioning a great number.

Jaafar then said to the khalif: "Put him to death, and you will be thus assured that he is equally mistaken respecting the length of your life and that of his own."

This advice was followed by the khalif, who then thanked Jaafar for having dispelled his sadness.

At the other extreme—though akin in sardonic humour—is this incident. It is related that one day, at Jaafar's, a beetle flew towards Abu Obaid the Thakefite, and that Jaafar ordered it to be driven away, when Abu Obaid said: "Let it alone; it may perhaps bring me good luck; such is at least the vulgar opinion."

Jaafar on this ordered one thousand dinars to be given him, saying: "The vulgar opinion is confirmed."

## A Boswell of Baghdad

The beetle was then set at liberty, but it flew towards Abu Obaid a second time, and Jaafar ordered him another present of the same amount.

Such was the affection the khalif felt for Jaafar that he caused a robe with two collars to be made which they could wear at the same time.

Fickle, however, are princes, and Jaafar's end came in the usual way, through treachery. He was killed, by the khalif's orders, by Yasir. Yasir having put Jaafar to death, carried in his head and placed it before the khalif.

The khalif looked at the head for some time, and then ordered Yasir to bring in two persons whom he named. When they came, he said to them: "Strike off Yasir's head, for I cannot bear the sight of Jaafar's murderer."

### XVIII.—LOVE AND LOVERS

As I have said, these four great volumes are a mine from which many different metals may be extracted. My own researches having tended rather to a certain ironic quality, I have passed many lovers by; but let me make an exception or so. There is, for example, Kuthaiyr. In



## The Truest Lover

the account of this celebrated Arabian amonist, we come upon a very pretty story. Being once in the presence of Abd Al-Malik, this prince said to Kuthaiyr: "I conjure thee by the rights of Ali Abi Ibn Talib to inform me if thou ever sawest a truer lover than thyself."

To this Kuthaiyr replied: "Commander of the Faithful! conjure me by your own rights, and I shall answer you."

"Well," said the prince, "I conjure thee by my own rights; wilt thou not tell it to me now?"

"Certainly," said Kuthaiyr; "I will. As I was travelling in a certain desert, I beheld a man who had just pitched his toils to catch game, and I said to him: 'Why art thou sitting here?' And he replied: 'I and my people are dying with hunger, and I have pitched these toils that I may catch something which may sustain our lives till to-morrow.' 'Tell me,' said I, 'if I remain with thee and thou takest any game, wilt thou give me a share?' He answered that he would; and whilst we were waiting, behold, a gazelle got into the net. We both rushed forward; but he outran me, and having disentangled the animal, he let it go. 'What,' said

## A Boswell of Baghdad

I, 'could have induced thee to do so?' He replied: 'On seeing her so like my beloved Laila in the eyes, I was touched with pity.'

Little men who are disposed to envy the big on account of fair ladies may take comfort from Kuthaiyr, for although so ardent and successful, he was absurdly small: so short indeed that, when he went to visit Abd Al-Aziz Ibn Marwan, that prince used to banter him and say: "Stoop your head, lest you hurt it against the ceiling."

He was called Rabb Ad-Dubab (the king of the flies) for the same reason. One of his contemporaries said: "I saw him making the circuits round the Kaaba; and if anyone tell you that his stature exceeded three spans, that person is a liar."

Abu Omar Az-Zahid Al-Mutarriz, although he "ranked among the most eminent and the most learned of the philologers," and was famous for his "mortified life," could write love poems too. Here is one: *Overcome with grief, we stopped at As-Sarat one evening, to exchange adieus; and, despite of envious foes, we stood unsealing the packets of every passionate desire. On saying farewell, she saw me borne down by the pains of love,*

## Wine, Women and Song

*and consented to grant me a kiss ; but, impelled by startled modesty, she drew her veil across her face. On this I said : "The full moon has now become a crescent." I then kissed her through the veil, and she observed : "My kisses are wine : to be tasted, they must be passed through the strainer."* (It seems, however, from Ibn Khallikan's anxious dubiety on the matter, that this poem, after all, may have been written, like the Iliad, by another poet of the same name. God only knows.)

Another Anacreontic, this time by Ibn Zuhr : *Whilst the fair ones lay reclining, their cheek pillowed on the arm, a hostile inroad of the dawn took us by surprise. I had passed the night in filling up their cups and drinking what they had left ; till inebriation overcame me, and my lot was theirs also. The wine well knows how to avenge a wrong ; I turned the goblet up, and that liquor turned me down.*

The poetry of love comprises, alas ! also the poetry of despair. Here is an example by Ibn As-Sarraaj, the grammarian : *I compared her beauty with her conduct, and found that her charms did not counterbalance her perfidy. She swore to me never to be false, but 'twas as if she had sworn never to be*

## A Boswell of Baghḍad

*true. By Allah! I shall never speak to her again, even though she resembled in beauty the full moon, or the sun, or Al-Muktafi!*

The inclusion of the khalif Al-Muktafi seems to have been an afterthought, added when the poet first saw him. Struck by his comeliness, he recited the poem to some companions and inserted his name at the end. The sequel is amusing and very characteristic. "Some time after, the katib Abu Abd Allah Muhammad Ibn Ismail Ibn Zenji repeated the verses to Abu 'l-Abbas Ibn Al-Furat, saying that they were composed by Ibn Al-Motazz, and Abu 'l-Abbas communicated them to the vizier Al-Kasim Ibn Obaid Allah. The latter then went to the khalif and recited the verses to him, adding that they were by Obaid Allah Ibn Abd Allah Ibn Tahir, to whom Al-Muktafi immediately ordered a present of one thousand dinars.

“‘How very strange,’ said Ibi Zenji, ‘that Ibn As-Sarraj should compose verses which were to procure a donation to Obaid Allah Ibn Abd Allah Ibn Tahir!’”

Abu Bakr Ibn Aiyash, the Traditionist and scholar, discovered a remedy for lovers which is

## In Mitigation

too simple, I fear, to commend itself to less philosophic Occidentals affected by the pains of longing. "I was suffering," he says, "from an anxious desire of meeting one whom I loved, when I called to mind the verse of Zu 'r-Rumma's : *Perhaps a flow of tears will give me ease from pain ; perhaps it may cure a heart whose sole companion is sad thoughts.* On this I withdrew to a private place and wept, by which means my sufferings were calmed."

### XIX.—TO DISARM CRITICS

And so we come to an end. And how can an author do better than to quote Ibn Khallikan's own concluding words, which, though written so long ago about a biographical dictionary, may be borrowed by all literary hands as palliation for whatever shortcomings their work may have?—"If any well-informed person remark, in examining this book, that it contains faults, he should not hasten to blame me, for I always aimed at being exact, as far as I could judge ; and, besides, God has allowed no book to be faultless except His noble *Koran.*"



## DIVERSIONS





## DIVERSIONS

Nurses    ∩    ∩    ∩    ∩    ∩    ∩

THE conversation turning, as, round English fires, it often does, on the peculiarities of an old nurse of the family, I was struck again by the tenderness and kindness, shot through with humour, that are always evoked by this particular retrospective mood. I would even say that people are at their best when they are remembering their nurses. To recall one's parents is often to touch chords that vibrate too disturbingly; but these foster parents, chosen usually with such strange carelessness but developing often into true guardian angels, with good influences persisting through life—when, in reminiscent vein, we set them up, one against the other, can call from the speakers qualities that they normally may conspicuously lack. Quite dull people can

## Diversions

become interesting and whimsical as their thoughts wander back through the years to the day when old Martha or old Jane, or whoever it was, moulded them and scolded them and broke the laws of grammar. Quite hard people can then melt a little. Quite stern people can smile.

And quite funny people can become intensely funny, as I have melancholy reason to know, for, listening to these new anecdotes, I recalled the last occasion on which the fruitful theme of a Nanna's oddities had been developed; when the speaker was that fascinating athlete and gentleman, E. B., a gallant officer with a gift of mimicry as notable as his sense of fun and his depth of feeling, who, chiefly for the amusement of two children, but equally—or even more—to the delight of us older ones, not only gave us certain of his old nurse's favourite sayings, in her own voice, but reconstructed her features as he did so. All good mimicry astonishes and entertains me, and this was especially good, for it triumphed over the disabilities of a captain's uniform. Something very curious and pretty, and, through all our laughter, affecting, in the spectacle of this tall, commanding soldier painting with little

## Our First Friends

loving comic touches the portrait of the old Malapropian lady with her heart of gold. That was a few short months ago, and to-day E. B. lies in a French grave.

Malapropisms and old nurses are, of course, inseparable. Indeed, they formed again the basis of our talk the other evening, each of us having a new example to give, all drawn from memories of childhood. Wonderful how these quaint phrases stick—due, I suppose, to the fact that the child does not hear too much to confuse it, and when in this tenacious stage notices the sharp differences between the conversation of the literate, as encountered in the dining-room and drawing-room, and the much more amusing illiteracy below stairs. It will be a bad day for England when education is so prevalent that nursemaids have it too. Much less interesting will the backward look then become.

How far forward we have moved in general social decency one realizes after listening to such conversations as I have hinted at, where respect and affection dominate, and then turning to some of the children's books of a century ago—the kind of book in which the parents are always

## Diversions

right and made in God's image, and the children full of faults. In one of these I found recently a story of a little girl who, being rude and wilful with her maid, was rebuked by her kind and wise mamma in some such phrase as, "Although it has pleased the Almighty to set you and Sarah in such different positions, you have no right to be unjust to her."

Reflecting upon how great a change has come upon the relation of employers and employed, and how much greater a change is in store, it seems to me that one of the good human kinds of book that does not at present exist, and ought to be made, would bring together between two covers some of the best servants in history, public and private, and possibly in literature too. Nurses first, because the nurse is so much more important a factor in family life, and because, to my mind, she has never had honour enough. I doubt if enough honour could be paid to her, but the attempt has not been sufficiently made. And to-day, of course, the very word as I am using it has only a secondary meaning. By "nurse" to-day we mean first a cool, smiling woman, with a white cap and possibly a red cross, ministering

## A Book of Praise

to the wounded and the sick. We have to think twice in order to evoke the guardian angel of our childhood, the mother's right hand, and often so much more real than the mother herself. I would lay special emphasis on the nurse who, beginning as a young retainer, develops into a friend and to the end of her days moves on parallel lines with the family, even if she is not still of it. These old nurses, the nurses of whom the older we grow the more tenderly and gratefully we think—will no one give them a book of praise? I should love to read it. And there should not be any lack of material—with Stevenson's Alison Cunningham by no means last on the list.

But if on examination the material proved too scanty, then the other devoted servants might come in too, such as Sir Walter Scott's Tom Purdie, who should have a proud place, and that wonderful gardener of the great Dumas, whose devotion extended to confederacy.

Without Dumas' gardener, indeed, no book in honour of the fidelity of man to man could be complete. For just think of it! The only approach to the house of the divine Alexandre

## Diversions

being by way of a wooden bridge, this immortal tender of flowers and vegetables so arranged the planks that any undesired caller bearing a writ or long-overdue account would fall, all naturally and probably through his own confused carelessness, into the river; and, on being pulled out and restored to happy life, would not only abandon the horrid purpose of his visit, but, gratitude prompting, be generous enough to go at least part of the way towards paying the gardener's wages, which otherwise that resourceful benefactor might never obtain.

On a place in the volume for this exemplary character, I insist. But, as I say, nurses first.

No. 344260



COMING the other day, after every kind of struggle, at last into possession of one of the new pound notes, I was interested in placing it quickly under the microscope, so to speak, in order that, in case I never saw another, I should be able to describe it to my grandchildren. How indigent I have been may be gathered from the circumstance that this note, being numbered 344260, had three hundred and forty-four thousand two hundred and fifty-nine predecessors which had eluded me.

As a work of art it is remarkable—almost, indeed, a gallery in itself, comprising as it does portraiture, design, topography, and the delineation of one of the most spirited episodes in religious history. After the magic words “One Pound,” it is, of course, to St. George and the Dragon that the eye first turns. What Mr.

## Diversions

Ruskin would say of the latest version of the encounter between England's tutelary genius and his fearsome foe, one can only guess; but I feel sure that he would be caustic about the Saint's grip on his spear. To get its head right through the dragon's chest—taking, as it has done, the longest possible route—and out so far on the other side, would require more vigour and tension than is suggested by the casual way in which the thumb rests on the handle. Dragons' necks and bosoms are, I take it, not only scaly without but of a sinewy consistency within that is by no means easy to penetrate, and in this particular case the difficulty must have been increased by the creature's struggles, which, the artist admits, bent the spear very noticeably. None the less, the Saint's hold is most delicate, and his features are marked by the utmost placidity.

As a matter of fact, the Saint is not sufficiently armed on our £1 notes; for in real life, and particularly when he rode out on the Libyan plain to do battle with the dragon, he had a sword as well as a spear. But he could not have had both if he were dressed as the Treasury artist dresses him, unless he carried the sword



## St. George and the Dragon

between his teeth; which he is not doing. There is no better authority than *The Golden Legend*, and *The Golden Legend* (in the translation of Master William Caxton) testifieth thus: "Then as they [St. George and the King's daughter, whom the dragon desired,] spake together, the dragon appeared and came running to them, and St. George was upon his horse, and drew out his sword and garnished him with the sign of the cross, and rode hardily against the dragon which came towards him, and smote him with his spear [spear, now, take notice], and hurt him sore and threw him to the ground." The absence of the sword is one error that never ought to have gained currency. Another is the grievousness of the wound which is depicted; for in real life the wound was so slight, although sufficient, that the King's daughter—but let Master Caxton continue, for he writeth better than I ever shall. Having conquered the foe, St. George, according to *The Golden Legend*, "said to the maid: 'Deliver to me your girdle, and bind it about the neck of the dragon, and be not afeard.' When she had done so, the dragon followed her as it had been a meek beast and debonair." It was later, and

## Diversions

not until St. George had baptized the King and all his people (which was his reward), that he smote off the dragon's head.

To my mind *The Golden Legend* is too gentle with this contest. I like a real fight, and here one is almost as much defrauded as in the story of David and Goliath. In treating the victory over the dragon with equal lightness, perhaps the Treasury artist, even though he has not followed the authority closely enough in other ways, is justified; but he should have read the text more carefully, for no one can pretend that a dragon so drastically perforated as this one could follow a princess into the city. Indeed, it is such a *coup de grâce* as no self-respecting and determined dragon, furnished with wings, inflammable breath, and all the usual fittings, would have submitted itself to. Because, given wings, neither of which is broken, how would it have allowed itself to come into that posture at all?

Saints, however, must be saints; and their adversaries know this.

It was only, as I have said, with incredible difficulties that I could get this pound note to

## When Paper was Gold

study ; imagine, then, what pains and subterfuges were, in 1917, necessary in order to obtain the loan of a sovereign with which to compare the golden rendering of the same conflict. Eventually, however, I was successful, and one of the precious discs passed temporarily into my keeping. It lies beside No. 344260 on the table as I write. In this treatment—Mr. Ruskin's strictures upon which are familiar—one is first struck by the absurdity of the Saint's weapon : a short dagger with which he could never do any damage at all, unless either he fell off his horse or the dragon obligingly rose up to meet the blow. Fortunately, however, the horse has powerful hoofs, and one of these is inflicting infinite mischief. Other noticeable peculiarities of the sovereign's rendering are the smallness of the horse's head and the length of St. George's leg. The total effect, in spite of blemishes, is more spirited than that of No. 344260, but both would equally fill a Renaissance Florentine medallist with gloom.

So much for the St. Georges and the Dragons of Treasury artists. But when it comes to No. 344260's portrait of Mr. John Bradbury, Secretary

## Diversions

to the Treasury, over his facsimile autograph, in green ink, I have no fault to find. This is a strong profile treatment, not a little like the King, and I am glad to have seen it. One likes to think of regal features and tonsorial habits setting a fashion. Mr. John Bradbury does well and loyally to resemble as closely as he can his royal master.

Having reached this point, I turned No. 344260 over and examined the back, which represents the Houses of Parliament as seen from Lambeth. There are three peculiarities about this picture. One is that all the emphasis is laid—where of late we have not been in the habit of looking for it—on the House of Lords; another is that Parliament is not sitting, for the Victoria Tower is without its flag; and the third is that Broad Sanctuary has been completely eliminated, so that the Abbey and the Victoria Tower form one building. No doubt to the fortunate persons through whose hands one pound notes pass, such awful symbolism conveys a sense of England's greatness and power; but I think it would be far more amusing if the back had been left blank, in case some later Robbie Burns (could this

## Robbie's Lament

decadent world ever know so fine a thing again)  
wished to write another lament on it :

For lack o' thee I've lost my lass,  
For lack o' thee I scrimp my glass.

Or, if not blank, thirty (say) spaces might be ruled on it, in which the names of its first thirty owners could be written. By the time the spaces were filled it would be a document historically valuable now and then to autograph collectors. It would also be dirty enough to call in.

## The Two Perkinses    ♪    ♪    ♪    ♪

WALKING in the garden in the cool of the July evening, I was struck afresh by the beauty of that climbing rose we call Dorothy Perkins, and by her absolute inability to make a mistake. There are in this garden several of these ramblers, all heritages from an earlier tenant and all very skilfully placed: one over an arch, one around a window, and three or four clambering up fir posts on which the stumps of boughs remain; and in every case the rose is flowering more freely than ever before, and has arranged its blossoms, leaves, and branches with an exquisite and impeccable taste. Always lovely, Dorothy Perkins is never so lovely as in the evening, just after the sun has gone, when the green takes on a new sobriety against which her gay and tender pink is gayer and more tender. "Pretty little Dolly Perkins!" I said to myself

## A Mediterranean Songster

involuntarily, and instantly, by the law of association — which, I sometimes fondly suppose, is more powerful with me than with many people— I began to think of another evening, twenty and more years ago, when for the first time I heard the most dainty of English comic songs sung as it should be, with the first words of the chorus accentuated like hammer blows in unison :

For—she—was—as—

and then tripping merrily into the rest of it :

—beautiful as a butterfly,  
As fair as a queen,  
Was pretty little Polly Perkins  
Of Paddington Green.

It is given to most of us—not always without a certain wistful regret—to recall the circumstances under which we first heard our favourite songs ; and on the evening when I met “Pretty Polly Perkins” I was on a tramp steamer in the Mediterranean, when at last the heat had gone and work was over and we were free to be melodious. My own position on this boat was nominally purser, at a shilling a month, but in reality passenger, or super-cargo, spending most of the day either in

## Diversions

reading or sleeping. The second engineer, a huge Sussex man, whose favourite theme of conversation with me was the cricket of his county, was, it seemed, famous for this song; and that evening, as we sat on a skylight, he was suddenly withdrawn from a eulogy of the odd ways and deadly left-handers of poor one-eyed "Jumper" Juniper (whom I had known personally, when I was a small school-boy, in a reverential way) to give the company "Pretty Polly Perkins." In vain to say that he was busy, talking to me; that he was dry; that he had no voice. "Pretty Polly Perkins" had to be sung, and he struck up without more ado:

I'm a broken-hearted milkman,  
In woe I'm arrayed,  
Through keeping the company of  
A young servant maid—

and so forth. And then came the chorus, which has this advantage over all other choruses ever written, that the most tuneless singer on earth (such as myself) and the most shamefaced (I am autobiographical again) can help to swell, at any rate, the notable opening of it, and thus ensure the success of the rest.



## Pretty Polly in Boston

That evening, as I say, was more than twenty years ago, and I had thought in the interval little enough of the song until the other pretty Perkins suggested it; but I need hardly say that the next day came a further reminder of it (since that is one of the queer rules of life) in the shape of a Chicago weekly paper with the information that America knows "Pretty Polly Perkins" too.

The ballads of a nation for the most part respect their nationality, but now and then there is free trade in them. It has been so with "Pretty Polly Perkins"; for it seems that, recognizing its excellence, an American singer prepared, in 1864, a version to suit his own country, choosing, as it happens, not New York or Washington as the background of the milkman's love drama, but the home of Transatlantic culture itself, Boston. Paddington Green would, of course, mean nothing to American ears, but Boston is happy in the possession of a Pemberton Square, which may, for all I know, be as important to the Hub of the Universe as Merrion Square is to Dublin, and Polly was, therefore, made comfortable there, and, as Pretty Polly Perkins of Pemberton Square, became as famous as, in our effete hemi-

## Diversions

sphere, Pretty Polly Perkins of Paddington Green. The adaptor deserves great credit for altering as little as possible. Beyond Polly's abode, and the necessary rhymes to mate with Square, he did nothing, so that the song, while transplanted to America, remained racy of the English capital. It was still the broken-hearted milkman who sang it, and the *dénouement*, which is so very English—and, more than English, Cockney—was unaltered :

In six months she married,  
That hard-hearted girl ;  
It was not a squire,  
And it was not a nearl.  
It was not a baronet,  
But a shade or two wuss—  
'Twas the vulgar old driver  
Of a twopenny 'bûs.

But the story of Polly is nothing. The merit of the song is its air, the novelty and ingenuity of its chorus, and the praises of Polly which the chorus embodies. The celebration of charming women is never out of date. Some are sung about in the Mediterranean, some in Boston, and some all the world over ; others give their names to roses.

## Harry Clifton

So far had I written—and published—in a weekly paper, leaving open a loophole or two for kind and well-instructed readers to come to my aid; and as usual (for I am very fortunate in these matters) they did so. Before I was a month older I knew all. I knew that the author, composer, and singer of “Pretty Polly Perkins of Paddington Green” were one and the same: the famous Harry Clifton; and that Polly married “not the vulgar old driver” of a two-penny ’bus, as was my mistaken belief, but quite the reverse—that is to say, the “bandy-legged conductor” of the same vehicle. A gentleman in Ireland was even so obliging as to send me another ballad by Harry Clifton, on the front of which is his portrait and on the back a list of his triumphs—and they make very startling reading, at any rate to me, who have never been versatile. The number of songs alone is appalling: no fewer than thirty to which he had also put the music and over fifty to which the music was composed by others, but which with acceptance he sang. Judging by the titles and the first lines, which in the advertisement are always given, these songs of the sixties were very much better things

## Diversions

than most of the songs of our enlightened day. They seem to have had character, a humorous sententiousness, and a genial view of life. And judging by his portrait on the cover, Harry Clifton was a kindly, honest type of man, to whom such accessories of the modern comic singer's success as the well-advertised membership of a night club, or choice of an expensive restaurant, were a superfluity.

Having read these letters and the list of songs, I called on a friend who was at that moment lying on a bed of sickness, from which, alas! he never rose—the late George Bull, the drollest raconteur in London and one of the best of men, who, so far as I am concerned, carried away with him an irreplaceable portion of the good humour of life; and I found that the name of Harry Clifton touched more than one chord. He had heard Harry Clifton sing. As a child, music-halls were barred to him, but Harry Clifton, it seems, was so humane and well-grounded—his fundamentals, as Dr. Johnson would say, were so sound—that he sang also at Assembly Rooms, and there my friend was taken, in his tender years, by his father, to hear him. There he heard the

## Pat of Mullingar's Mare

good fellow, who was conspicuously jolly and most cordially Irish, sing several of his great hits, and in particular "A Motto for Every Man," "Paddle Your Own Canoe," and "Lannigan's Ball" (set to a most admirable jig tune which has become a classic), one phrase from which was adopted into the Irish vernacular as a saying: "Just in time for Lannigan's ball." Clifton might indeed be called the Tom Moore of his day, with as large a public, although not quite so illigant a one. For where Moore warbled to the ladies, Clifton sang to the people. Such a ballad as that extolling the mare of Pat of Mullingar must have gone straight to the hearts of the countrymen of Mr. Flurry Knox:

They may talk of Flying Childers,  
And the speed of Harkaway,  
Till the fancy it bewilders  
As you list to what they say.  
But for rale blood and beauty,  
You may travel near and far—  
The fastest mare you'll find belongs  
To Pat of Mullingar.

An old lady in Dublin who remembers Clifton singing this song tells me that the chorus, "So we'll trot along O," was so descriptive, both in

## Diversions

words and music, that one had from it all the sensations of a "jolt."

Harry Clifton seems to have had three distinct lines—the comic song, of which "Pretty Polly Perkins" may be considered the best example; the Irish song; and the Motto song, inculcating a sweet reasonableness and content amid life's many trials and tribulations. Although, no doubt, such optimism was somewhat facile, it cannot be denied that a little dose of silver-lining advice, artfully concealed in the jam of a good tune and a humorous twist of words, does no harm and may have a beneficial effect. The chorus of "A Motto for Every Man," for example, runs thus:

We cannot all fight in this battle of life,  
The weak must go to the wall.  
So do to each other the thing that is right,  
For there's room in this world for us all.

An easy sentiment; but sufficient people in the sixties were attracted by it to flock to hear Harry Clifton all over England and Ireland, and it is probable that most came away with momentarily expanded bosoms, and a few were stimulated to follow its precepts.

## A Mine of Melody

Looking down this remarkable list of titles and first lines—which may be only a small portion of Harry Clifton's output—I am struck by his cleanliness and sanity. His record was one of which he might well be proud, and I think that old Fletcher of Saltoun, who had views on the makers of a nation's ballads, would probably have clapped him on the back.

Another thing. If many of the tunes to these songs are as good as that to "Polly Perkins," Harry Clifton's golden treasury should be worth mining. The songs of yesterday, when revived, strike one as being very antiquated, and the songs of the day before yesterday also rarely bear the test; but what of the songs of the sixties? Might their melodies not strike freshly and alluringly on the ear to-day? Another, and to-day a better known, Harry—Harry Lauder—whose tunes are always good, has confided to an interviewer that he finds them for the most part in old traditional collections, and gives them new life. He is wise. John Stuart Mill's fear that the combinations of the notes of the piano might be used up was probably fantastic, but the arrival of the luckless day would at any rate be delayed

## Diversions

if we revived tunes that were old enough for that process ; and why should not the works of Harry Clifton be examined for the purpose ? But perhaps they have been . . .

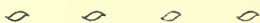
And then we come back to the marvel, to me, of the man's variousness. I can plead guilty to having written the words of a dozen songs or so in as many years, but to put two notes of music together is beyond me, and to sing anything in tune would be an impossibility, even if I had the assurance to stand up in public for that purpose. Yet Harry Clifton, who, in the picture on the cover of the song which the gentleman in Ireland sent me, does not look at all like some brazen lion comiques, not only could sing acceptably but write good words and good music. I hope he grew prosperous, although there is some evidence that his native geniality was also a stumbling-block. Your jolly good fellows so often are the victims of their jolly goodness. Nor had the palmy days of comic singing then begun. There were then no £300 a week bribes to lure a comic singer into *revue* ; but the performers, I guess, were none the worse for receiving a wage more in accordance with true proportion. I say true



## £300 a Week

proportion, because I shall never feel it right that music-hall comedians should receive a bigger salary than a Prime Minister; at least, not until they sing better songs and take a finer view of life in their "patter" than most of them now do.

## Arts of Invasion



ALL people living in the country are liable to be asked if they do not know of "some nice little place that would just suit us." "For week-ends, chiefly"—the inquirer usually adds. "A kind of *pied-à-terre*, you know"—the inquirer always adds.

Cautious, self-protective people answer no. Foolish, gregarious people actually try to help.

Addressing that large and growing class, the *pied-à-terre* hunters, not as a potential neighbour, but as a mere counsellor and very platonic friend, I would say that I have recently discovered two ways of acquiring country places, both of which, although no doubt neither is infallible, have from time to time succeeded.

It was at the end of a fruitless day on the same quest that I hit upon the first. After tramping many miles in vain, I was fortunate in getting a

## The Unsettler

fly at the village inn to drive me to the nearest station. I don't say I had seen nothing I liked, but nothing that was empty. As a matter of fact, I had seen one very charming place, but every window had a curtain in it and the chimneys were sending up their confounded smoke. In other words, it was, to use one of the most offensive words in the language, occupied. Hence I was in a bad temper. None the less, when a little man in black suddenly appeared before me and begged to be allowed to share my cab (and its fare), I agreed. He began to talk at once, and having disposed of the weather and other topics on which one can be strictly and politely neutral, he said that his business took him a good deal into unfamiliar places.

Being aware that he wished it, I asked him what his business was.

"I'm an unsettler," he said.

"An unsettler?"

"Yes. It's not a profession that we talk much about, because the very essence of it is secrecy, but it's genuine enough, and there are not a few of us. Of course, we do other things as well, such as insurance agency, but unsettling pays best."

## Diversions

“Tell me about it,” I said.

“Well,” he explained, “it’s like this. Say you are thinking of moving and you want another house. You can’t find an empty one that you like, of course. No one can. But you differ from other persons in being unwilling to make a compromise. You will either wait till you find one that you do like, or you will go without. Meanwhile you see plenty of occupied houses that you like, just as every one else does. But you differ from other persons in being unwilling to believe that you can’t have what you want. Do you follow me?”

Naturally I followed him minutely, because he was describing my own case.

“Very well, then,” he continued. “This makes the unsettler’s opportunity. You return to the agent and tell him that the only house you liked is (say) a white one at East Windles.

“‘It was not one on your list,’ you say; ‘in fact, it was occupied. It is the house on the left, in its own grounds, just as you enter the village. There is a good lawn, and a wonderful clipped yew hedge.’

## The Dislodgment of Ladies

“‘Oh yes,’ says the agent, ‘I know it: it used to be the Rectory.’

“‘Who lives there?’ you ask.

“‘An old lady named Burgess,’ says the agent—‘Miss Burgess.’

“‘Would she leave?’ you ask.

“‘I should very much doubt it,’ says the agent, ‘but I could, of course, sound her.’

“‘I’ll give you twenty-five pounds,’ you say, ‘if you can induce her to quit.’ And off you go.

“It is then that the unsettler comes in. The agent sends for me and tells me the story; and I get to work. The old lady has got to be dislodged. Now what is it that old ladies most dislike? I ask myself. It depends, of course; but on general principles a scare about the water is safe, and a rumour of ghosts is safe. The water-scare upsets the mistress, the ghost-scare upsets the maids; and when one can’t get maids, the country becomes a bore. As it is, she had the greatest difficulty in keeping them, because there’s no cinema near.

“Very well, then. Having decided on my line of action, I begin to spread reports—very cautiously, of course, but with careful calculation,

## Diversions

and naturally never appearing myself; and gradually, bit by bit, Miss Burgess takes a dislike to the place. Not always, of course. Some tenants are most unreasonable. But sooner or later most of them fall to the bait, and you get the house. That's my profession."

"Well," I said, "I think it's a blackguard one."

"Oh, sir!" he replied. "Live and let live."

"It's funny, all the same," I added, "that I should have run across you, because I've been looking for a house for some time, and the only one I liked was occupied."

He pulled out a pocket-book. "Yes?" he said, moistening his pencil.

But that is enough of him.

So much for my first way, which, as I happen to know, has succeeded, at any rate once. Now for the other, which is less material. In fact, some people might call it supernatural.

I was telling a lady about my friend the un-settler and his methods; but she did not seem to be in the least impressed.

"All very well," she said; "but there's a more

## A *Pied-à-terre*

efficient and more respectable way than that. And," she added, with a significant glance at her husband and not without triumph, "I happen to know."

She sat at the dinner-table in the old farmhouse—"modernized," as the agents have it, "yet redolent of old-world charm." By modernized they mean that the rightful occupiers—the simple agriculturists—had gone for ever, and well-to-do artistic Londoners had made certain changes to fit it for a week-end retreat. In other words, it had become a *pied-à-terre*. Where the country folk for whom all these and smaller cottages were built now live, who shall say? Probably in mean streets; anyway, not here. The exterior remains often the same, but inside, instead of the plain furniture of the peasantry, one finds wicker arm-chairs and sofa-chairs, all the right books and weekly papers, and cigarettes.

This particular farm-house was charming. An ingle-nook, Heal furniture, old-pattern cretonnes and chintzes, an etching or two, a Japanese print or two, a reproduction of a John, the poems of Mr. Masefield and Rupert Brooke, a French

## Diversions

novel, the *New Statesman*, and where once had been a gun-rack a Della Robbia Madonna.

"It's delightful," I said ; adding, as one always does : "How *did* you get to hear of it ?"

"Hearing of it wasn't difficult," she said, "because we'd known about it for years. The trouble was to get it."

"It wasn't empty, then ?" I replied.

"No. There was a Mr. Broom here. We asked him if he wanted to go, and he said No. We made him an offer, and he refused. He was most unreasonable." (It was the same word that the unsettler had used.)

I agreed : "Most."

"So there was nothing for it but to will his departure."

"Will ?"

"Yes. Concentrate our thoughts on his giving notice, and invite our friends to do the same. I wrote scores of letters all round, impressing this necessity, this absolute, sacred duty, on them. I asked them to make a special effort on the night of March 18th, at eleven o'clock, when we should all be free. It sounds rather dreadful, but I always hold that the people who want a



## Conspirators

house most are best fitted to have it. One can't be too nice in such matters."

"Well?" I asked.

"Well, you'll hardly believe it—and I shan't be a bit vexed if you don't—but on the morning of the 20th of March I had a letter from Mr. Broom saying that he had decided to leave, and we could have the first call on his house. It was too wonderful. I don't mind confessing that I felt a little ashamed. I felt it had been too easy."

"It is certainly a dangerous power," I said.

"Well," she continued, "I hurried round to see him before he could change his mind. 'Do you really want to leave?' I asked him. 'Yes,' he said. 'Why?' I asked. 'Well,' he said, 'I can't tell you why. I don't know. All I know is that all of a sudden I have got tired and feel vaguely that I want a change. I am quite sure I am making a mistake and I'll never find so good a place; but there it is: I'm going.' I assure you I felt for a moment inclined to back out altogether and advise him to stay on. I was even half disposed to tell him the truth; but I pulled myself together. And—well, here we are!"

## Diversions

"It's amazing," I said. "You must either have very strong-minded friends, or the stars have played very oddly into your hands, or both."

"Yes," she said; "but there's a little difficulty. One has to be so careful in this life."

"One has," I fervently agreed. "But what is it?"

"Some of my friends," she explained, "didn't quite play the game. Instead of willing, as I explicitly indicated, that our Mr. Broom should leave the Manor Farm, they willed merely that Mr. Broom should leave his house, and the result is that all kinds of Mr. Brooms all over the country have been giving notice. I heard of another only this morning. In fact, our Mr. Broom's brother was one of them. It's a very perilous as well as a useful gift, you see. But we've got the farm, and that's the main thing."

She smiled the smile of a conqueror.

"But," remarked another of the guests, who had told us that she was looking for a *pied-à-terre*, "there's a catch somewhere, isn't there? Don't you see any weak point?"

Our hostess smiled less confidently. "How?" she asked uneasily.

## Perils of Will

“Well,” the guest continued, “suppose . . . It couldn’t, I mean, be in better hands. For the moment. But suppose some one else wanted it? Take care. Willing is a game that two can play at.”

“You don’t mean——?” our hostess faltered.

“I do, most certainly,” the guest replied. “Directly I go away from here I shall make a list of my most really obstinate, pushful friends to help me.”

“But that would be most unfair,” said our hostess.

“No one is fair when hunting the *pie-d-à-terre*,” I reminded her.

## The Marble Arch and Peter Magnus ◊

FINDING myself (not often in London on the day that comes so mercifully between the Saturday and Monday) beside the enisled Marble Arch, I spent half an hour in listening to the astonishing oratory that was going on there. Although I had not done this for many, many years, there was so little change in the proceedings that I gained a new impression of perpetual motion. The same—or to all intents and purposes the same—leather lungs were still at it, either arraigning the Deity or commending His blessed benefactions. As invariably of old, a Hindu was present; but whether he was the Hindu of the Middle Ages or a new Hindu, I cannot say. One proselytizing Hindu is strangely like another. His matter was familiar also. The only novelty that I noticed was a little band of American evangelists (America being so little

## Hyde Park Orators

in need of spiritual assistance that these have settled in London) in the attire more or less of the constabulary of New York, the spokesman among whom, at the moment I joined his audience, was getting into rather deep water in an effort to fit the kind of halo acceptable to modern evangelicals on the head of Martin Luther.

As I passed from group to group, with each step a certain inevitable question grew more insistent upon a reply; and so, coming to one of London's founts of wisdom and knowledge, I put it to him. "I suppose," I said, indicating the various speakers with a semicircular gesture, "they don't do all this for nothing?" The policeman closed one eye. "Not they," he answered; "they've all got sympathizers somewhere."

Well, live and let live is a good maxim, thought I, and there surely never was such a wonderful world as this, and so I came away; and it was then that something occurred which (for everything so far has been sheer prologue) led to these remarks. I was passing the crowd about one of the gentlemen—the more brazenly con-

## Diversions

fidant one—who deny the existence of a beneficent Creator, when the words, “Looking like a dying duck in a thunderstorm,” clanged out, followed by a roar of delighted laughter; and in a flash I remembered precisely where I was when, forty and more years ago, I first heard from a nursemaid that ancient simile and was so struck by its humour that I added it to my childish repertory. And from this recollection I passed on to ponder upon the melancholy truth that originality will ever be an unpopular quality. For here were two or three hundred people absolutely and hilariously satisfied with such a battered and moth-eaten phrase, even to-day, and perfectly content that the orator should have so little respect either for himself or for them that he saw no disgrace in thus evading his duty and inventing something new.

But was that his duty? That was my next thought; and a speech by that eternally veracious type whom Mr. Pickwick met at Ipswich, and who, for all his brief passage across the stage of literature, is more real than many a prominent hero of many chapters, came to mind to answer it. I refer to Mr. Peter Magnus, who, when

## The Wiser Way

Mr. Pickwick described Sam Weller as not only his servant and almost friend, but an "original," replied in these deathless words: "I am not fond of anything original; I don't like it; don't see any necessity for it." And that's just it. The tribe of Magnus is very large; it doesn't like originality, and doesn't see any necessity for it—which, translated into the modern idiom, would run "has no use for it." Hence the freethinker was right, and the longer he continues to repose his faith in ancient comic *clichés* the greater will be his success.

And then I thought for the millionth time what an awful mistake it is to be fastidious. Truly wise people—and by wisdom I mean an aggregation of those qualities and acceptances and compromises that make for a fairly unruffled progress through this difficult life—truly wise people are not fastidious. They are easily pleased, they are not critical, and—and this is very important—they allow of no exceptions among human beings. Originals bore them as much as they did Mr. Magnus. One of the astutest men that I know has achieved a large measure of his prosperity and general content-

## Diversions

ment by behaving always as though all men were alike. Because, although of course they are not alike, the differences are too trifling to matter. He flatters each with the same assiduity and grossness, with the result that they all become his useful allies. Those that do not swallow the mixture, and resent it, he merely accuses of insincerity or false modesty; yet they are his allies too, because, although they cannot accept his methods, being a little uncertain as to whether his intentions may not have been genuinely kind, or his judgment honestly at fault, they give him the benefit of the doubt.



## The Oldest Joke      ∩      ∩      ∩      ∩

MANY investigators have speculated as to the character of the first joke; and as speculation must our efforts remain. But I personally have no doubt whatever as to the subject-matter of that distant pleasantry: it was the face of the other person involved. I don't say that Adam was caustic about Eve's face or Eve about Adam's: that is improbable. Nor does matrimonial invective even now ordinarily take this form. But after a while, after cousins had come into the world, the facial jest began; and by the time of Noah and his sons the riot was in full swing. In every rough and tumble among the children of Ham, Shem, and Japhet, I feel certain that crude and candid personalities fell to the lot, at any rate, of the little Shems.

So was it then; so is it still to-day. No jests are so rich as those that bear upon the unloveli-

## Diversions

ness of features not our own. The tiniest street urchins in dispute always—sooner or later—devote their retorts to the distressing physiognomy of the foe. Not only are they conforming to the ancient convention, but they show sagacity too, for to sum up an opponent as “Face,” “Facey,” or “Funny Face,” is to spike his gun. There is no reply but the cowardly *tu quoque*. He cannot say, “My face is not comic, it is handsome”; because that does not touch the root of the matter. The root of the matter is your opinion of his face as deplorable.

Not only is the recognition of what is odd in an opponent’s countenance of this priceless value in ordinary quarrels among the young and the ill-mannered (just as abuse of the opposing counsel is the best way of covering the poverty of one’s own case at law), but the music-hall humorist has no easier or surer road to the risibilities of most of his audience. Jokes about faces never fail and are never threadbare. Sometimes I find myself listening to one who has been called—possibly the label was self-imposed—the Prime Minister of Mirth, and he invariably enlarges upon the quaintness of somebody’s features,

## The Oldest Joke

often, for he is the soul of impartiality, his own ; and the first time, now thirty years ago, that I ever entered a music-hall (the tiny stuffy old Oxford at Brighton, where the chairman with the dyed hair—it was more purple than black—used to sit amid a little company of bloods whose proud privilege it was to pay for his refreshment), another George, whose surname was Beauchamp, was singing about a siren into whose clutches he had or had not fallen, who had

an indiarubber lip  
Like the rudder of a ship.

—So you see there is complete continuity.

But the best example of this branch of humour is beyond all question that of the Two Macs, whose influence, long though it is since they eclipsed the gaiety of the nation by vanishing, is still potent. Though gone they still jest ; or, at any rate, their jests did not all vanish with them. The incorrigible veneration for what is antique displayed by low comedians takes care of that. “I saw your wife at the masked ball last night,” the first Mac would say, in his rich brogue. “My wife was at the ball last night,” the other would reply in a brogue of deeper

## Diversions

richness, "but it wasn't a masked ball." The first Mac would then express an overwhelming surprise, as he countered with the devastating question, "Was *that* her face?"

"You're not two-faced, anyway. I'll say that for you," was the apparently magnanimous concession made by one comedian to another in a recent farcical play. The other was beginning to express his gratification when the speaker continued: "If you were, you wouldn't have come out with that one." Again, you observe, there is no answer to this kind of attack. Hence, I suppose, its popularity. And yet perhaps to take refuge in a smug sententiousness, and remark crisply, "Handsome is as handsome does," should now and then be useful. But it requires some self-esteem.

There is no absolute need, however, for the face joke to be applied to others to be successful. Since, in spite of the complexion creams, "plumpers," and nose-machines advertised in the papers, faces will continue to be here and there somewhat Gothic, the wise thing for their owners is to accept them and think of other things, or console themselves before the un-

## President Wilson

flattering mirror with the memory of those mortals who have been both quaint-looking and gifted. Wiser still perhaps to make a little capital out of the affliction. Public men who are able to make a jest of the homeliness of their features never lose by it. President Wilson's public recital of the famous lines on his countenance (which I personally find by no means unprepossessing) did much to increase his popularity.

As a beauty I am not a star,  
There are others more handsome by far.  
But my face, I don't mind it,  
For I keep behind it ;  
It's the people in front get the jar.

And an English bishop, or possibly dean, came, at last, very near earth when in a secular address he repeated his retort to the lady who had commented upon his extraordinary plainness: "Ah, but you should see my brother." There is also the excellent story of the ugly man before the camera, who was promised by the photographer that he should have justice done to him. "Justice!" he exclaimed. "I don't want justice ; I want mercy."

The great face joke, as I say, obviously came

## Diversions

first. Because there were in the early days none of the materials for the other staple quips—such as alcohol, and sausages, and wives' mothers. Faces, however, were always there. And not even yet have the later substitutes ousted it. Just as Shakespeare's orator, "when he is out," spits, so does the funny man, in similar difficulties, if he is wise, say, "Do you call that a face?" and thus collect his thoughts for fresh sallies. If all "dials" were identical, Mr. George Graves, for example, would be a stage bankrupt; for, resourceful as he is in the humour of quizzical disapproval, the vagaries of facial oddity are his foundation stone.

Remarkable as are the heights of grotesque simile to which all the Georges have risen in this direction, it is, oddly enough, to the other and gentler sex that the classic examples (in my experience) belong. At a dinner-party given by a certain hospitable lady who remained something of an *enfant terrible* to the end of her long life, she drew the attention of one of her guests, by no means too cautiously, to the features of another guest, a bishop of great renown. "Isn't his face," she asked, in a deathless sentence,

## The Oldest Joke

“like the inside of an elephant’s foot?” I have not personally the honour of this divine’s acquaintance, but all my friends who have met or seen him assure me that the similitude is exact. Another lady, happily still living, said of the face of an acquaintance, that it was “not so much a face, as a part of her person which she happened to leave uncovered, by which her friends were able to recognize her.” A third, famous for her swift analyses, said that a certain would-be beauty might have a title to good looks but for “a rush of teeth to the head.” I do not quote these admirable remarks merely as a proof of woman’s natural kindliness, but to show how even among the elect—for all three speakers are of more than common culture—the face joke holds sway.

## The Puttenhams



### I

From *The Mustershire Herald and Oldcaster Advertiser*

“THE new volume of *The Mustershire Archæological Society's Records* is, as usual, full of varied fare. . . . But for good Oldcastrians the most interesting article is a minute account of the Puttenham family, so well known in the town for many generations, from its earliest traceable date in the seventeenth century. It is remarkable for how long the Puttenhams were content to be merely small traders and so forth, until quite recently the latent genius of the blood declared itself simultaneously in the constructive ability of our own millionaire ex-townsmen, Sir Jonathan Puttenham (who married a daughter of Lord Hammerton), and in the world-famous skill of the great chemist, Sir



## The Puttenham

Victor Puttenham, the discoverer of the Y-rays, who still has his country home on our borders. The simile of the oak and the acorn at once springs to mind."

### II

Miss Enid Daubeney, who is staying at Sir Jonathan Puttenham's, to her Sister

MY DEAR FLUFFETY,—There are wigs on the green here, I can tell you. Aunt Virginia is furious about a genealogy of the Puttenham family which has appeared in the county's archæological records. It goes back ever so far, and derives our revered if somewhat stodgy and not-too-generous uncle-by-marriage from one of the poorest bunches of ancestors a knight of industry ever had. Aunt Virginia won't see that, from such loins, the farther the spring the greater the honour, and the poor man has had no peace and the article is to be suppressed. But since these things are published only for subscribers and the volume is now out, of course nothing can be done. Please telegraph that you can't spare me any longer, for the meals here

## Diversions

are getting impossible. Not even the peaches  
compensate.—Your devoted  
ENID

### III

Sir Jonathan Puttenham to the Rev. Stacey  
Morris, Editor of *The Mustershire Archæological  
Society's Records*

DEAR SIR,—I wish to utter a protest against what I consider a serious breach of etiquette. In the new volume of your *Records*, you print an article dealing with the history from remote times of the family of which I am a member, and possibly the best-known member at the present day. The fact that that family is of humble origin is nothing to me. What I object to is the circumstance that you should publish this material, most of which is of very little interest to the outside world, without first ascertaining my views on the subject. I may now tell you that I object so strongly to the publication that I count on you to secure its withdrawal.—I am,

Yours faithfully,

JONATHAN PUTTENHAM

## The Puttenham

### IV

Horace Vicary, M.D., of Southbridge, to his  
old friend the Rev. Stacey Morris

DEAR MORRIS,—It's a good volume, take it all round. But what has given me, in my unregeneracy, the greatest pleasure is the article on the Puttenham. For years the Puttenham here have been putting on airs and holding their noses higher than the highest, and it is not only (as they say doubly of nibs) grateful and comforting, but a boon and a blessing, to find that one of their not too remote ancestors kept a public-house, and another was a tinsmith. And I fancy I am not alone in my satisfaction.

Yours, H. V.

### V

Sir Victor Puttenham, F.R.S., to the Editor of  
*The Mustershire Archaeological Society's Records*

DEAR SIR,—As probably the most widely-known member of the Puttenham family at the present moment, may I thank you for the generous space which you have accorded to our history.

## Diversions

To what extent it will be readable by strangers I cannot say, but to me it is intensely interesting, and if you can arrange for a few dozen reprints in paper wrappers I shall be glad to have them. I had, of course, some knowledge of my ancestors, but I had no idea that we were quite such an undistinguished rabble of groundlings for so long. That drunken whipper-in to Lord Dashingham in the seventeen-seventies particularly delights me.—I am,

Yours faithfully,

VICTOR PUTTENHAM

## VI

From Sir Jonathan Puttenham to the Editor of  
*The Mustershire Herald and Oldcaster Advertiser*

DEAR SIR,—I shall be obliged if you will make no more references in *The Herald* to the new *Mustershire Archæological Records'* article on the Puttenhams. It is not that it lays emphasis on the humble origin of that family. That is nothing to me. But I am at the moment engaged in a correspondence with the Editor on the propriety of publishing private or semi-

## The Puttenham

private records of this character without first asking permission, and as he will possibly see the advisability of withdrawing the article in question there should be as little reference to it in the Press as possible.—I am,

Yours faithfully,

JONATHAN PUTTENHAM

### VII

The Rev. Stacey Morris to Sir Jonathan  
Puttenham

The Editor of *The Mustershire Archæological Society's Records* begs to acknowledge Sir Jonathan Puttenham's letter of the 15th inst. He regrets that the publication of the Puttenham genealogy should have so offended Sir Jonathan, but would point out, firstly, that it has for years been a custom of these Records to include such articles; secondly, that the volume has now been delivered to all the Society's members; thirdly that there are members of the Puttenham family who do not at all share Sir Jonathan's views; and, fourthly, that if such views obtained generally the valuable and interesting pursuit of

## Diversions

genealogy, of which our President, Lord Hammer-ton, to name no others, is so ardent a patron, would cease to be practised.

### VIII

Miss Lydia Puttenham, of "Weald View," Ruser Common, Tunbridge Wells, to Lady Puttenham

DEAR COUSIN MILDRED,—I wonder if Sir Victor has seen the article on our family in *The Archaeological Records*. I am so vexed about it, not only for myself and all of us, but particularly for him and you. It is not right that a busy man working for humanity, as he is doing, should be worried like that. Indeed I feel so strongly about it that I have sent in my resignation as a member of the Society. Why such things should be printed at all I cannot see. It is most unfair and unnecessary to go into such details, nor can there be the slightest reason for doing so, for the result is the dullest reading. Perhaps Sir Victor could get it stopped. Again expressing my sympathy, I am,

Yours affectionately,

LYDIA PUTTENHAM

## The Puttenham

### IX

The Rev. Stacey Morris to Ernest Burroughs,  
the compiler of the Puttenham genealogy

MY DEAR BURROUGHS,— We are threatened with all kinds of penalties by Sir Jonathan Puttenham, the great contractor, over your seamy revelations. It is odd how differently these things are taken, for the other great Puttenham, the chemist, Sir Victor, is delighted and is distributing copies broadcast. Equal forms of snobbishness, a Thackeray would perhaps say. But my purpose in writing is to say that I hope you will continue the series undismayed.

Yours sincerely,

STACEY MORRIS

## Poetry made Easy    ∩    ∩    ∩    ∩

I N the admirable and stimulating lecture given to the English Association by Professor Spurgeon on "Poetry in the Light of War," I came again upon that poem of Rupert Brooke's in which he enumerates certain material things that have given him most pleasure in life. "I have been so great a lover," he writes, and then he makes a list of his loves, thus following, perhaps all unconsciously, Lamb's *John Woodvil* in that rhymed passage which, under the title "The Universal Lover," has been detached from the play. But Lamb, pretending to be Elizabethan, dealt with the larger splendours, whereas Rupert Brooke's modernity took count of the smaller. John Woodvil's list of his loves begins with the sunrise and the sunset; Rupert Brooke sets down such mundane and domestic trifles as white plates and cups, the hard crust of bread, and the roughness of blankets.



## Rupert Brooke

This, to strangers to the poem, may not sound very poetical, but they must read it before they judge. To me it is at once one of the most satisfying and most beautiful leaves in the Georgian anthology. Here is a passage :

Holes in the ground ; and voices that do sing ;  
Voices in laughter too ; and body's pain  
Soon turned to peace ; and the deep-panting train ;  
Firm sands ; the little dulling edge of foam  
That browns and dwindles as the wave goes home ;  
And washen stones, gay for an hour ; the cold  
Graveness of iron ; moist black earthen mould ;  
Sleep ; and high places ; footprints in the dew ;  
And oaks ; and brown horse-chestnuts, glossy-new ;  
And new-peeled sticks, and shining pools on grass ;  
—All these have been my loves.

My reason in quoting these fine and tender lines is to point out how simple a thing poetry can be ; how easily we, at any rate for a few moments—even the most material, the most world-brutalized of us,—can become poets too. For I hold that any man searching his memory for the things that from earliest days have given him most delight, and sincerely recording them, not necessarily with verbal garniture at all, is while he does so a poet. A good deal of Whitman is little else but such catalogues ; and

## Diversions

Whitman was a great poet. The effort (even without the reward of this not-always-desired label) is worth making, because (and this is where the poetry comes in) it forces one to visit the past and dwell again in the ways of pleasantness before the world was too much with us and life's hand had begun to press heavily: most of such loves as Rupert Brooke recalls having their roots in our childhood. Hence such poetry as we shall make cannot be wholly reading without tears.

I find that on my list of loves scents would take a very important place—the scent of gorse warmed by the sun coming almost first, gorse blossoms rubbed in the hand and then crushed against the face, geranium leaves, the leaves of the lemon verbena, the scent of pine trees, the scent of unlit cigars, the scent of cigarette smoke blown my way from a distance, the scent of coffee as it arrives from the grocer's (see what a poet I am!), the scent of the underside of those little cushions of moss which come away so easily in the woods, the scent of lilies of the valley, the scent of oatcake for cattle, the scent of lilac, and, for reasons, above all perhaps the scent of a rubbish fire in the garden.

## Scents

Rupert Brooke mentions the feel of things. Among the loves of the sense of touch I should include smooth dried beans, purple and spotted, and horse-chestnuts, warm and polished by being kept in the pocket, and ptarmigan's feet, and tortoiseshell spoons for tea-caddies. And among sounds, first and foremost is the sound of a carriage and pair, but very high in position is that rare ecstacy, the distant drum and panpipes of the Punch and Judy. Do they play the panpipes still, I wonder. And how should I behave if I heard them round the corner? Should I run? I hope so. Scent, sound, touch, and sight. Sight? Here the range is too vast, and yet here, perhaps, the act of memory leads to the best poetry of all. For to enumerate one's favourite sights—always, as Rupert Brooke may be said to have done, although not perhaps consciously, in the mood of one who is soon to lose the visible world for ever—is to become, no matter how humble the list, a psalmist.

The mere recollecting and recording even such haphazard memories as these has had the effect of reconstructing also many too-long-forgotten scenes of pure happiness, and has urged me about this

## Diversions

dear England of ours too, for I learned to love  
gorse on Harpenden Common, and pinewoods at  
Amphill, and moss in Kent, and the scent of  
coffee in the kitchen of a home that can never be  
rebuilt, and—but poetry can be pain too.

## A Pioneer ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡

TO be the first is always an achievement, even though the steps falter. To be the first is also a distinction that cannot be taken away, because whoever comes after must be a follower; and to follow is tame. It occasionally happens that the first, no matter how many imitate him, is also the best; but this cannot be said of Baboo Ramkinoo Dutt, retired medical officer on pension, a tiny pamphlet by whom has just fluttered my way.

Mr. Dutt's pioneer work was done in the realms of poesy, somewhen in the eighteen-sixties, and the fruits are gathered together in this *brochure* under the title *Songs*, published at Chittagong, in India, which, in some bewildering way, reached a second edition in 1886. In the opening "distich" Mr. Dutt makes the claim to be the first Asiatic poet to write in English, and

## Diversions

if that is true this insignificant work becomes the seed of which the full flower is the gifted Rabindra, son of Tagore, whose mellifluous but mystic utterances lie, I am told, on every boudoir table. Me they, for the most part, stump.

Baboo Ramkinoo Dutt, although a pioneer, made no claim himself to have originated the startling idea of writing songs "in English word" and English rhyme; he merely accepted the suggestion and acted upon it. The suggestion came, under divine guidance, from Mr. J. D. Ward, the Chittagong magistrate. Here are the lines, setting forth that epoch-making moment, in an address to the Deity :

I thank Thee for an idea that Thou has created in my  
heart  
On which through the faculty I met now a very fresh  
art.

Being myself desired by the Chittagong magistrate, Mr.  
J. D. Ward,  
Got encouraged and commence writing a few songs in  
English word.

To Mr. Ward, then, much honour; and, indeed, one of Ramkinoo Dutt's pleasantest qualities is his desire always to give honour where it is due.

## Ramkinoo Dutt

Mr. Ward was perhaps his especial darling among the white sahibs of Chittagong, but all are praised. Thus, in another invocation to Heaven, we read :

King, conqueror of nations, encourage two sorts of mortals,  
One skilled in war, the other in counsel.

If so, why not Captain Macdonald should be the former?

If so, why not Mr. J. D. Ward would be the latter?

And here is part of a "distich on arrival of 38th N.I." :

We paid a visit upon Captain John A. Vanrenen,  
He is a high-spirited hero and jolly gentleman,

So is the Lieutenant George Fergus Graham,  
So is the Lieutenant Henry Tottenham.

The last poem of all is wholly devoted to eulogies of Chittagong worthies. For example, Mr. H. Greavesour, the judge,

Is a pious and righteous man,  
Administering justice with mental pain.

Of Mr. D. R. Douglas :

There is Mr. D. R. Douglas, Joint Magistrate,  
His judgment is pure, yes, on the highest rate.

## Diversions

And Mr. A. Marsh, Magistrate-Collector :

He is devout, holy man, naturally shy,  
His mind seems runs through righteous way.

And the Executive Engineer, Mr. C. A. Mills :

The energetic gentleman is getting on well.

All these were living and probably in daily reception of the obeisances of the retired medical officer who esteemed them so highly ; but Dr. Beatson was dead :

We lost, lately lost, Dr. W. B. Beatson.  
We again shall never gain him in person. . . .  
He is a Dr. Philanthropist,  
He is a Dr. Physiognomist,  
He is a Dr. Anatomist,  
He is His Lordship's personal Surgeon.

It will be seen already that Mr. Dutt had not yet mastered his instrument, but he did not lack thoughts : merely the power to express them. Throughout these thirty odd pages one sees him floundering in the morass of a new language, always with something that he wants to say but can only suggest. Here, for example, is a personal statement, line by line more or less inarticulate, but as a whole clear enough. With all



## A Credo

the mental incompleteness, the verbal looseness, the fumbings and gropings of the traditional Baboo, it is a genuine piece of irony. Seldom can a convert to Christianity have been more frank.

I would not accept a second creation,  
I thank the Omnipotent for his kind protection,  
From my minority,  
I profess the mendacity,  
Passed days in poverty,  
From my minority.  
Perpetually my duty,  
Sobbing under perplexity.  
Nothing least prosperity,  
But sad and emotion.

I gave up the heathenism,  
And its favouritism,  
Together with the Hinduism.

I gave up the heathenism.  
Neither the fanaticism,  
Nor the paganism,  
Or my idiotism,  
Could enrich me with provision.

Such was the poetical pioneer, Baboo Ramkinoo Dutt, who (supposing always that we may accept his statement as true) was the first Hindu to write English verse.

## Full Circle



I HAVE lately been the witness of two phenomena.

Not long ago two officers and gentlemen (whom I had never seen before and one of whom, alas! I shall never see again) descended from a blue sky on to a neighbouring stretch of sward; had tea with me in my garden; and, ascending into the blue again, were lost to view. Since it is seldom that the heavens drop such visitants upon us in the obscure region in which I live, it follows that while the aviators were absent from their machine the news had so spread that by the time they rejoined it and prepared to depart, a crowd had assembled not unworthy of being compared, in point of numbers, with that which two workmen in London can bring together whenever they begin to make a hole in the wood-block paving. I had not thought so many people lived

## The Aeroplane

in the neighbourhood. Every family, at any rate was represented, while the rector looked on with the tolerant smile that the clergy keep for the wonders of science, and just at the last moment up panted our policeman on his bicycle, and pulling out his notebook and pencil for the aviators' names (Heaven knows why), set upon the proceedings the seal of authority.

Whatever may be said against aeroplanes in full flight, and there is quite a long indictment—that they are, for instance, not at all like birds, and much more like dragon-flies, and are too noisy, and too rigid, and so forth,—no one in his senses can deny that as they rise from the ground—especially if you are behind them and they are receding swiftly in a straight line from you, and even more so if you are personally acquainted with the occupants—they have beautiful and exciting qualities. Not soon shall I forget the sight as my guests in their biplane glided exquisitely from the turf into the air and, after one circular sweep around our bewildered heads, swam away in the direction of the Hog's Back.

That was phenomenon No. 1. Phenomenon No. 2—also connected with the mechanics of

## Diversions

quicker movement than Shanks's mare ever compassed—was one of those old high bicycles, a fifty-two inch, I should guess, dating from the late eighteen-seventies, which, although the year was 1916, was being ridden along the Brighton front.

I am, unhappily, old enough to have been the owner of a bone-shaker, upon which I can assure you I had far more amusing times than on any of its luxurious progeny, even though they were fitted with every device that all the engineers' brains in the world, together with the white hat and beard of Mr. Dunlop, have succeeded in inventing. Being able to remember the advent of the high bicycle and the rush to the windows and gates whenever word went forth that one was approaching (much as a few of the simpler among us still run when the buzz of the aeroplane is heard), I was, as I watched the interest aroused among Brighton's butterflies by this antique relic, in a position to reflect, not I trust sardonically, but at any rate without any feelings of triumph, upon the symmetrical completion of—I must not say one cycle of mechanical enterprise, but one era. For this high bicycle (which was

## A Glimpse of the Obsolete

perhaps built between thirty and forty years ago) wobbling along the King's Road drew every eye. Before that moment we had been looking at I know not what—the *Skylark*, maybe, now fitted with auxiliary motor power; or the too many soldiers in blue clothes, with only one arm or one leg, and sometimes with no legs at all, who take the sun near the Palace Pier and are not wholly destitute of female companionship. But when this outlandish vehicle came we all stopped to gaze and wonder, and we watched it out of sight.

“Look at that extraordinary bicycle!” said the young, to whom it was something of the latest.

“Well, I'm blessed,” said the old, “if there isn't one of those high bicycles from before the Flood!”

And not only did it provide a diverting spectacle, but it gave us something to talk about at dinner, where we compared old feats perched on these strange monsters, in the days when the road from John o' Groats to Land's End was thick with competitors, and half the male world wore the same grey cloth, and the Vicar of

## Diversions

Ripley strove every Sunday for the cyclist's soul.

Being myself didactically disposed, I went farther than reminiscence and bored my companions with some such reflections as those that follow. It is not given (I said) to many of us to have a second time on earth, but this bicycle is having it, and enjoying it. In the distant eighteen-seventies or eighties it was, as a daring innovation, a marvel and a show. Then came (I went on) all the experiments and developments under which cycling has become as natural almost as walking, during which it lay neglected in corners, like the specimen in the London Museum in the basement of Stafford House. And then an adventurous boy discovered it, and riding it to-day bravely beside that promenade of sun-beetles, assisted it (I concluded) to box the compass and transform the Obsolete into the Novelty.

Some day, if I live, there may visit me from the blue as I totter among the flower-beds an aeroplane of so scandalous a crudity and immaturity that all the countryside, long since weary of the sight and sound of flying machines, then so common that every cottager will have one, will

## Man and Inventions

again cluster about it while its occupants and I drink our tea.

For with mechanical enterprise there is no standing still. Man, so conspicuously unable to improve himself, is always making his inventions better.

A Friend of Man      ◡      ◡      ◡      ◡

IN TWO PARTS

I. THE FALLEN STAR

ONCE upon a time there was a pug dog who could speak.

I found him on a seat in Hyde Park.

“Good afternoon,” he said.

Why I was not astonished to be thus addressed by a pug dog, I cannot say; but it seemed perfectly natural.

“Good afternoon,” I replied.

“It’s a long time,” he said, “since you saw any of my kind, I expect?”

“Now I come to think of it,” I replied, “it is. How is that?”

“There’s a reason,” he said. “Put in a nutshell it’s this: Peeks.” He wheezed horribly.



## The Passing of the Pug

I asked him to be more explicit, and he amplified his epigram into: "Pekingese."

"They're all the rage now," he explained; "and we're out in the cold. If you throw your memory back a dozen years or so," he went on, "you will recall our popularity."

As he spoke I did so. In the mind's eye I saw a sumptuous carriage-and-pair. The horses bristled with mettle. The carriage was on C-springs, and a coachman and footman were on the box. They wore claret livery and cockades. The footman's arms were folded. His gloves were of a dazzling whiteness. In the carriage was an elderly commanding lady with an aristocratic nose; and in her lap was a pug dog of plethoric habit and a face as black as your hat.

All the time my new acquaintance was watching me with streaming eyes. "What do you see?" he asked.

I described my mental picture.

"There you are," he said; "and what do you see to-day? There, look!"

I glanced up at his bidding, and a costly motor was gliding smoothly by. It weighed several tons, and its tyres were like dropsical life-belts.

## Diversions

On its shining door was a crest. The chauffeur was kept warm by costly furs. Inside was an elderly lady, and in her arms was a russet Pekingese.

“So you see what went when I went,” the pug said, after a noisy pause. “It wasn’t only pugs that went; it was carriages-and-pairs, and the sound of eight hoofs all at once, and footmen with folded arms. We passed out together. Exeunt pugs. Enter Peeks and Petrol. And now we are out in the cold.”

I sympathized with him. “You must transfer your affection to another class, that’s all,” I said. “If the nobs have gone back on you, there are still a great many pug-lovers left.”

“No,” he said, “that’s no good; we want chicken. We must have it. Without it, we had better become extinct.” He wept with the sound of a number of syphons all leaking together, and waddled away.

At this moment the man who has charge of the chairs came up for my money. I gave the penny.

“I’m afraid I must charge you twopence,” the man said.

## The Beauties

I asked him why.

“For the dog,” he said. “When they talks we has to make a charge for them.”

“But it wasn’t mine,” I assured him. “It was a total stranger.”

“Come now,” he said; and to save trouble I paid him.

But how like a pug!

### 11. THE NEW BOOK OF BEAUTY

A hundred years ago the Books of Beauty had line engravings by Charles Heath, and long-necked, ringletted ladies looked wistfully or simperingly at you. I have several examples: *Caskets, Albums, Keepsakes*. The new Book of Beauty has a very different title. It is called *The Pekingese*, and is the revised edition for 1914.

The book is different in other ways too. The steel engravers having long since all died of starvation, here are photographs only, in large numbers, and (strange innovation!) there are more of gentlemen than of ladies. For this preponderance there is a good commercial reason, as any student of the work will quickly discover, for we

## Diversions

are now entering a sphere of life where the beauty of the sterner sex (if so severe a word can be applied to such sublimation of everything that is soft and voluptuous and endearing) is more considered than that of the other. Beautiful ladies are here in some profusion, but the first place is for beautiful and guinea-earning gentlemen.

In the old Books of Beauty one could make a choice. There was always one lady supremely longer-necked, more wistful or more simpering than the others. But in this new Book of Beauty one turns the pages only to be more perplexed. The embarrassment of riches is too embarrassing. I have been through the work a score of times and am still wondering on whom my affections and admiration are most firmly fixed.

How to play the part of Paris where all the competitors have some irresistibility, as all have of either sex? Once I thought that Wee Mo of Westwood was my heart's chiefest delight, "a flame-red little dog with black mask and ear-fringes, profuse coat and featherings, flat wide skull, short flat face, short bowed legs and well-shaped body." But then I turned back to Broadoak Beetle and on to Broadoak Cirawanzi,

## Superb Fatherhood

and Young Beetle, and Nanking Fo, and Ta Fo of Greystones, and Petshé Ah Wei, and Hay Ch'ah of Toddington, and that superb Sultanic creature, King Rudolph of Ruritania, and Champion Howbury Ming, and Su Eh of Newnham, and King Beetle of Minden, and Champion Hu Hi, and Mo Sho, and that rich red dog, Buddha of Burford. And having chosen these I might just as well scratch out their names and write others, for every male face in this book is a poem.

The ladies, as I have said, are in the minority, for the obvious reason that these little disdainful distinguished gentlemen figure here as potential fathers, with their fees somewhat indelicately named: since there's husbandry on earth as well as in heaven.

Such ladies as are here are here for their beauty alone and are beyond price. Among them I note with especial joy Yiptse of Chinatown, Mandarin Marvel, who "inherits the beautiful front of her sire, Broadoak Beetle"; Lavender of Burton-on-Dee, "fawn, with black mask"; Chi-Fa of Alderbourne, "a most charming and devoted little companion"; Yeng Loo of Ipsley; Detlong Mo-li of Alderbourne, one of the "beauti-

## Diversions

ful red daughters of Wong-ti of Alderbourne," Champion Chaou Chingur, of whom her owner says that "in quaintness and individuality and in loving disposition she is unequalled," and is also "quite a 'woman of the world,' very *blasée* and also very punctilious in trifles"; Pearl of Cotehele, "bright red, with beautiful back"; E-Wo Tu T'su; Berylune Tzu Hsi Chu; Ko-ki of Radbourne and Siddington Fi-fi.

Every now and then there is an article in the papers asking and answering the question, What is the greatest benefit that has come to mankind in the past half-century? The answer is usually the camera, or matches, or the Marconi system, or the cinema, or the pianola, or the turbine, or the Röntgen rays, or the telephone, or the bicycle, or Lord Northcliffe, or the motor-car. Always something utilitarian or scientific. But why should we not say at once that it was the introduction of Pekingesese spaniels into England from China? Because that is the truth.

## The Listener    ♪    ♪    ♪    ♪    ♪

ONCE upon a time there was a man with such delicate ears that he could hear even letters speak. And, of course, letters lying in pillar-boxes have all kinds of things to say to each other.

One evening, having posted his own letter, he leaned against the pillar-box and listened.

“Here’s another!” said a voice. “Who are you, pray?”

“I’m an acceptance with thanks,” said the new letter.

“What do you accept?” another voice asked.

“An invitation to dinner,” said the new letter, with a touch of pride.

“Pooh!” said the other. “Only that.”

“It’s at a house in Kensington,” said the new letter.

“Well, *I’m* an acceptance of an invitation to a

## Diversions

dance at a duchess's," was the reply, and the new letter said no more.

Then all the others began.

"I bring news of a legacy," said one.

"I try to borrow money," said another, rather hopelessly.

"I demand the payment of a debt," said a sharp metallic voice.

"I decline an offer of marriage," said a fourth, with a wistful note.

"I've got a cheque inside," said a fifth, with a swagger.

"I convey the sack," said a sixth in triumph.

"I ask to be taken on again, at a lower salary," said another, with tears.

"What do you think I am?" one inquired.  
"You shall have six guesses."

"Give us a clue," said a voice.

"Very well. I'm in a foolscap envelope."

Then the guessing began.

One said a writ.

Another said an income-tax demand.

But no one could guess it.

"I'm a poem for a paper," said the foolscap letter at last.



## The Listener

“Are you good?” asked a voice.

“Not good enough, I’m afraid,” said the poem.

“In fact I’ve been out and back again seven times already.”

“A war poem, I suppose?”

“I suppose so. I rhyme ‘trench’ and ‘French.’”

“Guess what I am,” said a sentimental murmur.

“Anyone could guess that,” was the gruff reply. “You’re a love-letter.”

“Quite right,” said the sentimental murmur. “But how clever of you!”

“Well,” said another, “you’re not the only love-letter here. I’m a love-letter too.”

“How do you begin?” asked the first.

“I begin ‘My Darling,’” said the second love-letter.

“That’s nothing,” said the first; “I begin ‘My Ownest Own.’”

“I don’t think much of either of those beginnings,” said a new voice. “I begin, ‘Most Beautiful.’”

“You’re from a man, I suppose?” said the second love-letter.

## Diversions

“Yes, I am,” said the new one. “Aren’t you?”

“No, I’m from a woman,” said the second. “I’ll admit your beginning’s rather good. But, how do you end?”

“I end with ‘A million kisses,’” said the new one.

“Ah, I’ve got you there!” said the second. “I end with ‘For ever and ever yours.’”

“That’s not bad,” said the first, “but my ending is pretty good in its way. I end like this: ‘To-morrow will be Heaven once more, for then we meet again.’”

“Oh, do stop all this love talk,” said the gruff voice again, “and be sensible like me. I’m a letter to an Editor putting everything right and showing up all the iniquities and ineptitudes of the Government. I shall make a stir, I can tell you. I’m It, I am. I’m signed ‘Pro Bono Publico.’”

“That’s funny!” said another letter. “I’m signed that too, but I stick up for the Government.”

But at this moment the listener was conscious of a hand on his arm and a lantern in his face.

## The Listener

“Here,” said the authoritative tones of a policeman, “I think you’ve been leaning against this pillar-box long enough. If you can’t walk I’ll help you home.”

Thus does metallic prose invade the delicate poetical realm of supernature.

## The Dark Secret



IT was the most perfect September day that anyone could remember. The sun had risen in a dewy mist. The early air was pungent with yellowing bracken.

Then the mist cleared, the dew disappeared from everywhere but the shadows, and the Red Admirals again settled on the Michaelmas daisies.

A young man walked up and down the paths of the garden and drank in its sweetness; then he passed on to the orchard and picked from the wet grass a reddening apple, which he ate. Something pulled at his flannel trousers: it was a spaniel puppy, and with it he played till breakfast-time.

He was staying with some friends for a cricket match. It was the last of the season and his only game that year. As one grows older and busier, cricket becomes less and less convenient, and on

## A Cricket Match

the two occasions that he had arranged for a day it had been wet.

He had never been a great hand at the game. He had never made 100 or even 70, never taken any really good wickets; but he liked every minute of a match, so much so that he was always the first to volunteer to field when there was a man short, or run for some one who was lame, or even to stand as umpire.

To be in the field was the thing. Those rainy interludes in the pavilion which so develop the stoicism of the first-class cricketer had no power to make a philosopher of him. All their effect on him was detrimental: they turned him black. He fretted and raged.

But to-day there was not a cloud; nothing but the golden September sun.

It was one of the jolly matches. There was no jarring element: no bowler who was several sizes too good; no bowler who resented being taken off; no habitual country-house cricketer whose whole conversation was the jargon of the game; no batsman too superior to the rest; no acerbitous captain with a lost temper over every mistake; no champagne for lunch. Most of the players

## Diversions

were very occasional performers: the rest were gardeners and a few schoolboys. Nice boys—boys who might have come from Winchester.

He was quickly out, but he did not mind, for he had had one glorious swipe and was caught in the deep field off another, and there is no better way of getting out than that.

In the field he himself stood deep, and the only catch that came to him he held; while in the intervals between wickets he lay on the sweet grass while the sun warmed him through and through. If ever it was good to be alive . . .

And suddenly the sun no longer warmed him, and he noticed that it had sunk behind a tree in whose hundred-yard-long shadow he was standing. For a second he shivered, not only at the loss of tangible heat, but at the realization that the summer was nearly gone (for it was still early in the afternoon), and this was the last cricket match, and he had missed all the others, and he was growing old, and winter was coming on, and next year he might have no chance; but most of all he regretted the loss of the incredible goodness of this day, and for the first time in his life the thought phrased itself in his mind: "No

## The Dark Secret

sooner do we grasp the present than it becomes the past." The haste of it all oppressed him. Nothing stands still.

"A ripping day, wasn't it?" said his host as they walked back.

"Perfect," he replied, with a sigh. "But how soon over!"

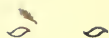
They stopped for a moment at the top of the hill to look at the sunset, and he sighed again as his thoughts flew to that print of the "Melancholia" which had hung on the stairs in his early home.

"Notice the sunset," some visitor had once said to him. "Some day you will know why Dürer put that in."

And now he knew.

That evening he heard the Winchester boys making plans for the winter sports at Pontresina in the Christmas vac.

## The Scholar and the Pirate



I N an old bookshop which I visit, never without making a discovery or two—not infrequently, as in the present case, assisted in my good fortune by the bookseller himself—I lately came upon an edition of Long's *Marcus Aurelius* with an admirable prefatory note that is, I believe, peculiar to this issue—that of 1869. And since the eyes of the present generation have never been turned towards America so often and so seriously as latterly, when our Trans-Atlantic cousins have become our allies, blood once more of our blood, the passage may be reprinted with peculiar propriety. Apart, however, from its American interest, the document is valuable for its dignity and independence, and it had the effect of sending me to that rock of refuge, *The Dictionary of National Biography*, to inquire further as to its author. There I found that



## George Long

George Long, whose translation of the Imperial Stoic is a classic, was born in 1800; educated at Macclesfield Grammar School and Trinity College, Cambridge; in 1821 was bracketed Craven scholar with Macaulay and Professor Malden, but gained a fellowship over both of them; and in 1824 went to Charlottesville, Virginia, as professor of ancient languages. Returning in 1828 to profess Greek at University College, London, he was thenceforward, throughout his long life, concerned with the teaching and popularizing of the classics, finding time, however, also to be called to the Bar, to lecture on jurisprudence and civil law, and to help to found the Royal Geographical Society. His *Marcus Aurelius* is his best-known work, but his edition of Cicero's Orations, his discourse on Roman Law, and his Epictetus also stand alone. After many years' teaching at Brighton College, Long retired to Chichester, where he died in 1879.

Late in life he brought out anonymously a book of essays, entitled *An Old Man's Thoughts about Many Things*, in which I have been dipping. I do not say it would bear reprinting now, but anyone seeing it on a friend's shelf should borrow

## Diversions

it, or in a bookshop should buy it, because such kindly good sense, such simple directness and candour and love of the humanities are rare. It has its mischief, too. The old scholar's opinion on statue-making in general and on London's statues in particular are expressed with a dry frankness that is refreshing. I make no effort to resist quoting a little :

“It is in the nature of things that statues should be made. They were made more than two thousand years ago, and I believe the business has never stopped, for when people could not get good statues, they were content with bad, as we are now.

“If I might give advice to the men now living, who look forward to the honour, if it is an honour, of being set up in bronze in the highways, or in marble in Westminster Abbey or St. Paul's; if I might advise, I would say, leave a legacy in your will for your own statue. It will save much trouble and people will think better of you when you are gone, if you cost them nothing. As to their laughing at you for looking after your own statue, be not afraid of that.

## English Statues

“It is very disagreeable nowadays to see a man standing for ever on his legs in public, doing nothing but stand, and seeming as if he were never going to do anything else.

“If a man shall try to persuade me that a statue should be nothing more than the effigy of a man standing on a pedestal, I shall never be convinced. I would rather see a living man standing on an inverted cask, as I have seen a slave when he was sold, not that the sale is a very pleasant thing to see, but the man produced a much better effect than many of our statues, for he expressed something and they express nothing.

“As we cannot or at least ought not to make our statues naked or blanket-dressed, and as body and legs are merely given to a statue in order to support the head, for the legs and body might be any legs and any body, would it not be wise to be satisfied with the head only? This would be a great saving, and though the sculptor would get less for a head than for a head with body and legs to it, he would have more heads to make. This is a hint, which I throw out by the way, for

## Diversions

the consideration of committees who sit on statues, by which I mean men who sit together to talk about a thing of which most of them know nothing.

“When the negroes of Africa have been brought to the same state of civilization as the white man, they will make statues and set them up in public; and as we who are white make black statues, they who are black will of course make white statues.

“Can anybody say what sin Dr. Jenner committed for which he does perpetual penance, not in white, but in black, his face black and his hands too, seated in the most public part of London, fixed to his chair, with no hope of rising from it?

“This seated figure might be anybody. I see nothing by which I recognize Dr. Jenner; to say nothing of a cow, there is not even a calf by his side, with the benevolent physician’s hand on the animal.

“I cannot approve of a seated black statue in the open air—a black man sitting, and no more.

## English Statues

“I sincerely pity our seated gentlemen in London, poor Cartwright, who looks like an old cobbler on his stool, and Fox, worse treated still, blanket-dressed, fat and black. No wonder some shortsighted man from the new Confederate States once took Fox for a negro woman, the emblem of British philanthropy and a memorial of the abolition of the slave trade.

“The only beasts on which we can now place our heroes are horses. I may be wrong in my opinion, but I see no beauty in a horse standing still and a man’s legs dangling down from the beast’s back; nor do I think that the matter is mended by the horse and rider being of colossal size, though they ought to be larger than life. Perhaps we shall not have any more of these statues; but is it impossible to remove those that we have?

“As we are a fighting people, we have been great makers of statues of fighting men. We put them even in churches. This reminds that when the time shall come for finishing and adorning the inside of St. Paul’s, there will be an enormous quantity of old stone to dispose of, which is now

## Diversions

in the shape of generals, captains, admirals, lions and other animals.

“It is singular, or it is not singular, I can't say which, that we who box, wrestle, run and in many ways work our bodies, more than any other nation, have not employed our sculptors to immortalize our athletic heroes. Some of them would make good subjects for the artist. He might strip the boxer or runner naked, if he liked, and exhibit his art in the representation of strength and beauty of form. I have some misgivings about the faces of boxers, which are not remarkable for beauty, but the artist may improve them a little without destroying the likeness; and besides, in a naked figure we look less at the face than at the body and limbs. The champion of England would certainly have had a statue by Lysippus or some artist as good, if he had been lucky enough to live in ancient times. . . . We shall, of course, want a place to put these statues in, for we may be sure they will not get into the churches, which are only made for statues of fighting men who have killed somebody or ordered somebody to kill somebody.

## George Long

“I could go on much longer, but I don't choose. I write to amuse myself, and also to instruct, and when I am tired, I stop. I see no reason why I should exhaust the subject. I should only be giving my ideas to people who have none, who make a reputation out of other folks' brains, who pounce on anything that they find ready to their hand, and flood us with books made only to sell.”

It is already, I imagine, abundantly clear that Long would not have much liked many things that we do to-day. Writing of “Place and Power,” he says: “At that very distant time when all members of Parliament shall be Andrew Marvells and will live on two hundred a year, poor men may do our business for us; but for the present I prefer men who are rich enough to live without the profits of place. I wish somebody would move for a return of all the visible and invisible means of support which every member of the Commons has. I want to know how much every man in the House receives of public money, whether he is soldier, sailor, place-holder, sinecurist, or anything else; and also how much he

## Diversions

has by the year of his own." Elsewhere he says: "There is no occasion to print any more sermons. . . . I have always wondered why so much is written on the doctrines and principles of Christianity and on good living, when we have it done long ago in a few books which we all refer to as our authority." And this is good: "I wish Euclid could have secured a perpetual copyright. It might have helped the finances of the Greeks."

But I am not proposing to dissect Long's essays; it is the fine rebuke to an American publisher that I want to bring to your notice, for there Long's habitual serenity takes an edge. His protest runs thus:

"I have been informed that an American publisher has printed the first edition of this translation of M. Antoninus. I do not grudge him his profit, if he has made any. There may be many men and women in the United States who will be glad to read the thoughts of the Roman Emperor. If the American politicians, as they are called, would read them also, I should be much pleased, but I do not think the emperor's morality would suit their taste.



## General Lee

“ I have also been informed that the American publisher has dedicated this translation to an American. I have no objection to the book being dedicated to an American, but in doing this without my consent the publisher has transgressed the bounds of decency. I have never dedicated a book to any man, and if I dedicated this, I should choose the man whose name seemed to me most worthy to be joined to that of the Roman soldier and philosopher. I might dedicate the book to the successful general who is now the President of the United States, with the hope that his integrity and justice will restore peace and happiness, so far as he can, to those unhappy States which have suffered so much from war and the unrelenting hostility of wicked men.

“ But, as the Roman poet said,

*Victrix causa Deis placuit, sed victa Catoni ;*

and if I dedicated this little book to any man, I would dedicate it to him who led the Confederate armies against the powerful invader, and retired from an unequal contest defeated, but not dishonoured ; to the noble Virginian soldier, whose talents and virtues place him by the side of the

## Diversions

best and wisest man who sat on the throne of the Imperial Cæsars.—GEORGE LONG.”

That is excellent prose, is it not? The general to whom Long would dedicate the edition was Robert Edward Lee, who had then become head of the Washington College and survived only until 1870. The President at the time that Long wrote was General Grant, to whom Lee surrendered.

One or two anecdotes of Long which have recently come my way would alone convince me, apart from the evidence of his record and his writings, that here was a very sterling and very independent “character” of whom much more should be known. Some day I hope to know more. Meanwhile I relate one of the stories. An appeal for cast-off clothing for the poor clergy being made, some one took the line that such an appeal was *infra dig*. Long smoked, pondered, and thus delivered himself: “But is it not paramount that these gentlemen should have trousers?”

## A Set of Three ◊ ◊ ◊ ◊ ◊

THE other day I saw three sights, and, although they have no connexion with each other, each was in its way sufficiently evocative of thought to make that day a little more interesting than most.

It was the first day of the tardy spring of 1917, or rather the first day into which had crept those hints that the power of the long, cruel war-winter must some day be broken. The sun was almost visible, and a tenderness now and then touched the air, and no one who is at all responsive to weather conditions could fail to be a little elated and believe once more not only in a future of sorts but also in a lurking benignancy somewhere. Stimulated myself in this way, even although I was approaching a rehearsal of a *revue*, I came suddenly in the King's Road upon that disused burial-ground opposite the Six Bells, and

## Diversions

was aware that, sitting there on seats facing the road, in white aprons and caps, with shawls over their shoulders, were five of the saddest old ladies I have ever seen—occupants, I presume, of a neighbouring workhouse. There they sat, saying nothing, and watching without enthusiasm the passers-by and the 'buses and the taxis and all the hurry and scurry of an existence from which they are utterly withdrawn and which they will soon leave for ever. Being on my frivolous errand, I was pulled up very short by the spectacle of five such stallholders as these whom the bigger *revue* which we call life had left so cold; and not only cold, but so tired and so white, as life loves to do. There was a poignancy in their very placidity, in the folded hands and the incommunicableness of them, that was very searching. There was criticism too. Hardly more sentient than the mummies which were displayed to the guests at Egyptian feasts, they were equally admonitory. . . .

I was glad again to be in the theatre listening to the familiar tones of the producer wondering why in thunder no one but himself had the faintest respect for punctuality.

## The Blind

Later in the day I saw a blinded officer, with both eyes bandaged, being led along Sloane Street. Blinded men are, alas! not rare, and it was not the officer himself that attracted my notice, but two fine, upstanding young soldiers who as they passed him saluted with as much punctilio as though he could see them. Of this salute he was, of course, wholly unconscious, but the precision with which it was given, and, indeed, the fact that it was given at all, could not but make an impression on the observer. It seemed to comprise so thoroughly both the spirit and the letter of discipline.

And late that night I watched in the Tube, after the theatres, a man and a small eager-faced boy talking about something they had been to see. Although sitting exactly opposite them, I have no idea what they said, but they amused each other immensely as they recalled this joke and that. Nothing extraordinary in this, you will say. But there was. The reason why I was so profoundly interested to be a witness of the scene was that they were deaf and dumb, and the whole conversation was carried on by signs; not by the alphabet that one learnt at

## Diversions

school in order to communicate during class, but a rapid synthetic improvement upon it, where two or three lightning-quick movements—gesture grammalogues—sufficed to convey whole sentences of meaning. It is perhaps curious, but I had never before been brought into such close contact with the deaf and dumb; I have never even been—as, since I profess to explore and study London, I should have been—to that church in Oxford Street, opposite the great secret emporium, where the deaf and dumb worship and by signs are exhorted to be good. Beyond watching that boys' school which one sees gesticulating on the Brighton front, I had never until this night seen these afflicted creatures in intimate and sparkling talk. I found the sight not only interesting, but as cheering as those poor old things in the King's Road oasis had been saddening. Because the unfortunates were making such a splendid fight for it. No boy with every faculty about him could have been gayer or merrier than this mute with the dancing eyes; nor can I conceive of a spoken conversation that contained a completer interchange of ideas in the same space of time.

## The Dumb

At Oxford Circus they got out, and left me pondering on deafness and dumbness. To be dumb, of course, is, comparatively speaking, nothing; for most of the perplexities of life come from talk. But to be deaf—to live ever in silence, to see laughing lips moving, to see hands wandering over the keys, to see birds exulting, and be denied the resultant harmonies: that must be terrible. Yet terrible only to those who have known what the solace and gaiety of words and the beauty of sound can be. To have been born deaf is different, and I have no doubt whatever that the deaf and dumb have delectable lands of their own into which we can never stray, where wonderful flowers of silence grow. It is even possible, since all the visible world is theirs, that they never envy us at all.

## A Lesson ◦ ◦ ◦ ◦ ◦ ◦

**G**OD—it is notorious—works in a mysterious way to get morality and decency into us; which is another way of saying that not all light is communicated by the Episcopal bench, by clerks in holy orders, by divines who do not conform, or by editors at Whitefield's Tabernacle.

The other day, for example, I had lunch with a very charming actress in a pleasant restaurant.

“Rather a funny thing happened the last time I was here,” she remarked.

“Yes?” I replied languidly.

“About you.”

“Oh!” I said with animation. “Do tell me.”

“It was also at lunch,” she explained. “The people at the next table were talking about you. I couldn't help hearing a little. A man there said he had met you in Shanghai.”

“Not really!” I exclaimed.

“Yes. He met you in Shanghai.”



## A Lesson

“That’s frightfully interesting,” I said. “What did he say about me?”

“That’s what I couldn’t hear,” she replied. “You see, I had to pay some attention to my own crowd. I only caught the word ‘delightful.’”

Ever since she told me this I have been turning it over in my mind; and it is particularly vexing not to know more. “Delightful” can be such jargon and mean nothing—or, at any rate, nothing more than amiability. Still, that is something, for one is not always amiable, even when meeting strangers. On the other hand, it might be, from this man, the highest praise.

The whole thing naturally leads to thought, because I have never been farther east than Athens in my life.

What did the man mean? Can we possibly visit other cities in our sleep? Has each of us an *alter ego*, who can really behave, elsewhere?

Whether we have or not, I know that this information about my Shanghai double is going to be a great nuisance to me. It is going to change my character. In fact, it has already begun to change it. Let me give you an example.

## Diversions

Only yesterday I was about to be very angry with a telegraph boy who brought back a telegram I had dispatched about two hours earlier, saying that it could not be delivered because it was insufficiently addressed. Obviously it was not the boy's fault, for he belonged to our country post office, and the telegram had been sent to London and was returned from there; and yet I started to abuse that boy as though he were not only the Postmaster-General himself but the inventor of red-tape into the bargain. And all for a piece of carelessness of my own.

And then suddenly I remembered Shanghai and how delightful I was there. And I shut up instantly, and apologized, and rewrote the message, and gave the boy a shilling for himself. If one could be delightful in Shanghai one must be delightful at home too.

And so it is going to be. There is very little fun for me in the future, and all because of that nice-mannered double in Shanghai whom I must not disgrace. For it would be horrible if one day a lady told him that she had overheard some one who had met him in London and found him to be a bear.

ON BELLONA'S HEM  
(SECOND SERIES)



## ON BELLONA'S HEM

### A Revel in Gambogia

THERE are certain ebullitions of frivolity about which, during the war, one has felt far from comfortable. To read reports of them, side by side with the various "grave warnings" which every one has been uttering, is to be almost too vividly reminded of England's capacity for divided action. But there are also others; and chief among these I should set the fancy-dress carnival of munition-workers at which I was privileged to be present one Saturday night. Here was necessary frivolity, if you like, for these myriad girls worked like slaves all the week, day and night, and many of them on Sundays too—and "National filling," as their particular task is called, is no joke either—and it was splendid to see them flinging themselves into the fun of this rare careless evening.

## On Bellona's Hem

Fancy dress being the rule, it was only right and proper that there should be prizes for the best costumes; and since the lady who shed her beneficence over this prismatic throng does nothing by halves, she had called in the assistance of two artists to adjudicate. I will not make public their names; that would be to overstep the boundaries of decorum and turn this book into sheer journalism. But I will say that one of them is equally renowned in Chelsea for his distinguished brushwork and his wit; and that the other's extravaganzas cheer a million breakfast-tables daily. How I, who am not an artist, and so little of a costumier that I did not even wear evening dress, got into this *galère* is the mystery. I can explain it only by a habit of good fortune, for I chanced to be in the studio of the Chelsea artist at the moment when the beneficent lady arrived to put her request to him, and, noticing my pathetic look, she in her great kindness included me in the invitation.

Deciding on the best costume when there are many hundreds of them, and they pass before the dazzled eye in a swift procession of couples, is not easy; and only very remarkable men could

## Fancy Dress

perform the task. Women might find it easier, because they would not be influenced, as one of our judges obviously was, by the external claims of personal beauty. A woman would look at the costume and nothing else, make her notes with scientific precision, and prepare for the next. But when the competitors are all—or almost all—girls, and most of them pretty and all jolly, why, how can you expect impartiality, especially in artists, and at any rate without a struggle? But in spite of the difficulties set up by the impact of so much charm upon the emotional susceptibilities of at any rate one judge, the process of selecting a first, second, and third was accomplished with, I should say—speaking as a calm, detached spectator, with all my feelings well under control—absolute equity.

The first prize went to a slender lady of whose features I can say nothing because I never saw them, her Eastern costume including a veil that covered her face. But it seemed to these not too discerning eyes that she was otherwise of an attractive shapeliness. As to her, the judges were unanimous; but when it came to the second they were divided. The Chelsea judge, again

## On Bellona's Hem

swayed by passion, and possibly recalling old triumphs in his Latin Quarter days, preferred a French costume; the other was firm for an Indian. What would have happened I dare not think, for each was a powerful and determined man, ready to stick at nothing, had I not, in my cool-headedness, been inspired to suggest tossing up for it, and the result was that, the coin showing heads, the Indian won, and the French costume naturally took the third prize. There were then two prizes to be awarded for the most original costumes, the previous ones having been for the prettiest costumes, and here the winner was a jovial lady who with her own hands had transformed herself into an advertisement for a certain soup powder.

The iron laws of etiquette (or is it finance?) which so cramp the style of any writer who refers to advertisements forbid me to state what particular soup powder this was; but according to the hoardings, the way in which a pennyworth will nourish and rejoice the human frame is, as the Americans say, something fierce. If the applause of the company was a guide, this prize-winner is a very popular figure among our



## Gambogia

“National fillers.” The second prize went to a very ingenious costume called “Tommy’s Parcel,” consisting of most things that a soldier likes to receive, and so thorough in design as to comprise, tied to the lady’s shoes, two packets of a harmful necessary powder without a copious sprinkling of which no trench is really like home. If the approving glances at “Tommy’s Parcel” from a young officer who was at my side are any indication, there are few of our warriors who would not welcome it with open arms.

And then—the prizes being all awarded—all these nice girls, on whose activities England has been so largely depending for safety, set again to partners.

But why, you ask, Gambogia? I thought you would want to know that. It is because in the making of munitions at the factory from which these girls all come there are certain chemicals which have the effect of turning the skin yellow. And among these merry revellers were some thus—but, I hope and believe, only temporarily—disfigured. The cheerfulness with which they are prepared to run these risks, not to mention others more perilous but less menacing to per-

## On Bellona's Hem

sonal vanity, is not the least of the finenesses of character which the war has brought out ; and the thought of that and of their hard work and their gay courage made the spectacle of the happy high spirits of this evening of playtime even more a satisfaction.

## The Misfire      ◡      ◡      ◡      ◡      ◡

WHEN I entered the third smoker there was, as there now always is, a soldier in one corner.

Just as we were starting, another soldier got in and sat in the opposite corner; and within two minutes they knew all about each other's camp, destination and regiment, and had exchanged cigarettes.

The first soldier had not yet left England and was stolid; the new-comer had been in the trenches, had been wounded in the leg, had recovered, was shortly going back, and was animated. His leg was all right, except that in wet weather it ached. In fact he could even tell by it when we were going to have rain. His "blooming barometer" he called it. Here he laughed—a hearty laugh, for he was a genial blade and liked to hear himself talk.

## On Bellona's Hem

The first soldier did not laugh, but was interested. He thought it a convenient thing to have a leg that foretold the weather.

"Which one is it?" he asked.

"The left."

The first soldier was disproportionately impressed.

"The left, is it?" he said heavily, as though he would have understood the phenomenon in the right easily enough. "The left."

Completely unconscious of the danger-signals, the second soldier now began to review his repertory of stories, and he started off with that excellent one, very popular in the early days of the war, about the wealthy private.

For the sake of verisimilitude he laid the scene in his own barracks. "A funny thing happened at our place the other day," he began. He had evidently had great success with this story. His expression indicated approaching triumph.

But no anticipatory gleam lit the face of his new friend. It was in fact one of those faces into which words sink as into sand—a white, puffy, long face, with a moustache of obsolete bushiness.

## The Misfire

“I thought I should have died of laughing,” the narrator resumed, utterly unsuspecting, wholly undeterred.

In the far corner I kept my eye on my book but my ears open. I could see that he was rushing to his doom.

“We were being paid,” he went on, “and the quartermaster asked one of the men if he did not wish sixpence to be deducted to go to his wife. The man said, ‘No.’ ‘Why not?’ the quartermaster asked. The man said he didn’t think his wife would need it or miss it. ‘You’d better be generous about it,’ the quartermaster said; ‘every little helps, you know.’”

He paused. “What do you think the man said to that?” he asked his new friend. “He said,” he hurried on, “‘I don’t think I’ll send it. You see, I allow her four thousand a year as it is.’”

The raconteur laughed loudly and leaned back with the satisfaction—or at least some of it—of one who has told a funny story and told it well.

But the other did not laugh at all. His face remained the dull thing it was.

## On Bellona's Hem

"You see," said the story-teller, explaining the point, "there are all sorts in the Army now, and this man was a toff. He was so rich that he could afford to allow his wife four thousand pounds a year. Four thousand pounds! Do you see?"

"Oh yes, I see that. He must have been very rich. Why was he just a private?"

"I don't know."

"Funny being a private with all that money. I wonder you didn't ask him."

"I didn't, anyway. But you see the point now. No end of a joke for the quartermaster to try and get a man who allowed his wife four thousand a year to deduct sixpence a week to send to her! I thought I should have died of laughing."

The first soldier remained impassive. "And what happened?" he asked at last.

"What happened?"

"Yes, what was done about it? The sixpence, I mean. Did he agree to send it?"

The second soldier pulled himself together. "Oh, I don't know," he said shortly. "That's not the point."

## The Misfire

“After all,” the other continued, “the regulations say that married men have to deduct sixpence for their wives, don’t they?”

“Yes, of course,” the other replied. “But this man, I tell you, already gave her four thousand a year.”

“That doesn’t really touch it,” said the first soldier. “The principle’s the same. Now——”

But I could stand the humiliation of the other honest fellow, so brimming with anecdote and cheerfulness, no longer; and I came to his rescue with my cigarette case. For I have had misfires myself.

## A Letter

*(From Captain Claude Seaforth to a novelist friend)*

MY DEAR MAN,—You asked me to tell you if anything very remarkable came my way. I think I have a story for you at last. If I could only write I would make something of it myself, but not being of Kitchener's Army I can't.

The other day, while I was clearing up papers and accounts, and all over ink, as I always get, the Sergeant came to me, looking very rum. "Two young fellows want to see you," he said.

Of course I said I was too busy and that he must deal with them.

"I think you'd rather see them yourself," he said, with another odd look.

"What do they want?" I asked.

"They want to enlist," he said; "but they don't want to see the doctor."



## A Letter

We've had some of these before—consumptives of the bull-dog breed, you know. Full of pluck but no mortal use; knocked out by the first route march.

“Why don't you tell them that they must see the doctor and have done with it?” I asked the Sergeant.

Again he smiled queerly. “I made sure you'd rather do it yourself,” he said. “Shall I send them in?”

So I wished them farther and said “Yes”; and in they came.

They were the prettiest boys you ever saw in your life—too pretty. One had red hair and the other black, and they were dressed like navvies. They held their caps in their hands.

“What's this rubbish about not seeing a doctor?” I asked. You know my brutal way.

“We thought perhaps it could be dispensed with,” Red Hair said, drawing nearer to Black Hair.

“Of course it can't,” I told them. “What use to the Army are weaklings who can't stand the strain? They're just clogs in the machinery. Don't you see that?”

## On Bellona's Hem

"We're very strong," Red Hair said, "only——"

"Only what?"

"Only——" Here they looked at each other, and Red Hair said, "Shall we?" and Black Hair said, "Yes"; and they both came closer to me.

"Will you promise," said Red Hair, "that you will treat as confidential anything we say to you?"

"So long as it is nothing dangerous to the State," I said, rather proud of myself for thinking of it.

"We want to fight for our country," Red Hair began.

"No one wants to fight more," Black Hair put in.

"And we're very strong," Red Hair continued.

"I won a cup for lawn-tennis at Devonshire Park," Black Hair added.

"But——" said Red Hair.

"Yes," I replied.

"Don't you believe in some women being as strong as men?"

"Certainly," I said.

"Well, then," said Red Hair, "that's like us. We are as strong as lots of men and much

## A Letter

keener, and we want you to be kind to us and let us enlist."

"We'll never do anything to give ourselves away," said Black Hair; but, bless her innocent heart, she was giving herself away all the time. Every moment was feminine.

The rum thing is that, although I had been conscious of something odd, I never thought they were girls. Directly I knew it, I knew that I had been the most unobservant ass alive; for they couldn't possibly be anything else.

"My dear young ladies," I said at last, "I think you are splendid and an example to the world; but what you ask is impossible. Have you thought for a moment what it would be like to find yourselves in barracks with the ordinary British soldier? He is a brave man and, when you meet him alone, he is nearly always a nice man; but collectively he might not do as company for you."

"But look at this," said Red Hair, showing me a newspaper-cutting about a group of Russian girls known as "The Twelve Friends," who have been through the campaign and were treated with the utmost respect by the soldiers.

## On Bellona's Hem

“And there's a woman buried at Brighton,” said Black Hair, “who fought as a man for years and lived to be a hundred.”

“And think of Joan of Arc,” said Red Hair.

“And Boadicea,” said Black Hair.

“Well,” I said, “leaving Joan of Arc and Boadicea aside, possibly those Russians and that Brighton woman looked like men, which it is certain you don't!”

“Oh!” said Black Hair, who was really rather peculiarly nice. “Then why didn't you spot us before?”

One for me.

“I have no doubt I should have done so in a moment more,” I said. “The fact is”—what cowards we are!—“I was preoccupied when you came in.”

Black Hair looked adorably as if she didn't believe it.

“But anyway,” I went on, “we must be serious. What would your people say?”

“We left word,” said Red Hair, “that we were going off to do something for our country. They won't worry. Oh, please be kind and help us!”

## A Letter

Here all four of their beautiful eyes grew moist.

I could have hugged both of them, especially perhaps Black Hair, but I kept an iron hand on myself.

“You nice absurd creatures,” I said, “do be reasonable. To begin with, passing the doctor is an absolute necessity. That shuts you out. But even if you got through, how do you think you would be helping your country? All the men would be falling in love with you; and that’s bad enough as it is after working hours; it would be the ruin of discipline. And you could not bear the fatigue. No, go back and learn to be nurses and let your lovely hair grow again.”

They were very obstinate and very unwilling to entertain the thought of drudgery such as nursing after all their dreams of excitement; but at last they came to reason, and I sent for a cab and packed them off in it (I simply could not bear the idea of other people seeing them in that masquerade), and told them that the sooner they changed the better.

After they had gone the Sergeant came in about something.

## On Bellona's Hem

I said nothing, and he said nothing, each of us waiting for the other.

He moved about absolutely silently, and I dared not meet his glance because I knew I should give myself away. The rascal has not been running his eye over young women all these years without being able to tell them in a moment, even in navy's clothes.

At last I could stand it no longer. "Damn it," I said, "what are you doing? Why don't you go? I didn't send for you." But still I didn't dare look up.

"I thought perhaps you had something to say to me, sir," he said.

"No, I haven't," I replied. "Why should I? What about?"

"Only about those two young men, sir," he replied.

"Get out," I said; but before he could go I had burst into laughter.

"Better not mention it," I managed to say.

He promised.

There—won't you find that useful?

Yours,

C. S.

## A Manor in the Air    ◊    ◊    ◊    ◊

THE stately homes of England have ever numbered some very odd names. Every one remembers that beautiful Southern retreat whither, to the delight of the wags, Mr. Balfour often journeyed for his week-end holiday—"Clouds," the seat of the Wyndhams. Could there be a much more fascinating name than "Clouds"? And then there is "Wrest," the late Lord Lucas's Bedfordshire home, afterwards transformed, how suitably, into a hospital for soldiers. And there is that Midland paradise which, in the days of placid, even life, the editors of illustrated weeklies always recollected with gratitude when they were short of other pictures—"Compton Wynyates."

But the new name which I have just discovered, and which fills the inward eye with joy, is a house on a smaller scale than these—a

## On Bellona's Hem

manor-house rather than a mansion, perhaps one of the smallest that can be described as a "gentleman's place," but assuredly that. Somewhere in Sussex, western Sussex.

It is not near the station, and to reach it you walk or drive along winding roads just now sodden with rain, but smelling of the good wet Sussex leaves and mast and soil, with the Downs rising not too many miles away in the South. Then a turn into a narrow lane, with the bare trees of a copse on either side and a scurrying pheasant in front of you, and behold the white gate! There is no lodge—the house is just too small for that, as you can now see for yourself, for there it is, under the protection of the wood that rises behind it, so quiet and self-contained that you almost gasp.

Very old it is, but good for many years more. The frame is of timber and plaster, and a Hors-ham stone roof. These stones are a little damp and moss-covered (for our ancestors insisted on building in a hole, or where would Friday's fish come from?), and the place is as Tudor as Queen Bess herself, in whose reign its foundations were dug. The chimney stacks, all smoking with the



## A Manor in the Air

thin blue smoke of logs, are of tiny Tudor bricks, and the chimneys are set not square with the house but cornerways. A long low façade with the central door in a square porch; the whole grave but serene.

A path of more Horsham stone leads to the door, with thyme and lavender springing from the interstices undismayed by the feet of man, and smooth lawns on each side, and under the diamond-paned windows a bed where in summer would be night stock and lemon verbena and tobacco plant and mignonette. On the roof a few white fantails; a spaniel near the door; and a great business of rooks in the sky. Through the windows of the lower rooms you see the greenery at the back of the house and a suggestion here and there of books and pictures—everything that makes a house a home.

Beside the house on the right are the stables; and on the other side is a dark shrubbery, and beyond that are more lawns and gardens and the fish-pond.

Do you see it? Perhaps you have already seen it differently; for how could you help forming some mental picture of it when in

## On Bellona's Hem

every carriage on the L.B. & S.C.R. is posted up the notice, "Passengers to Lower Blinds"?

To me "Lower Blinds," whither all these fortunate passengers are journeying, is just such a manor-house as that.

## Rivalry



WHEN I sat down on the seat facing the Row there was already on it a soldier in the familiar blue clothes. He had the red moustache which inevitably leads to the nickname of "Ginger," or possibly "Carrots," and he was smoking a cigarette. By his side were his crutches. After a minute or so a very tall figure, also in blue, hobbled towards us and took the space between Ginger and myself.

The freemasonry of arms has, I suppose, always, among rankers, made any introduction needless; but there has unhappily come in a new and a super freemasonry which goes beyond anything that uniform could do. I mean the freemasonry of mutilation. By reason of their wounds these strangers were as brothers.

At first they talked hospitals. Then regiments. Then Haig, of whom it has so finely and finally been said, by another British hero:

## On Bellona's Hem

“’Aig ’e don’t say much; ’e don’t, so to say, say nothin’; but what ’e don’t say don’t mean nothin’, not ’arf. But when ’e do say something—my Gawd!” Then they came to grips and mentioned the cause of their injuries—bullet or shrapnel. Then the time and the place. Both had been hit in the knee, and this coincidence, operating like all coincidences, added to their friendliness. Their cigarettes finishing simultaneously, Ginger gave Six-foot-two one of his; and Six-foot-two offered his little packet to Ginger in exchange.

“Do you often come here?” Ginger asked.

“Every fine day,” said Six-foot-two, “unless there’s a ride in a brake or a free matinee on the tappy.”

“I must look you up again,” said Ginger.

“Do,” said Six-foot-two. “When do you expect to leave?”

“I can’t say,” replied Ginger. “There’s no knowing. You see mine’s a very extraordinary case.” He smiled complacently.

“That’s funny. So’s mine,” said Six-foot-two.

“How do you mean—extraordinary?” the other asked a little sharply.

## The Rivals

“Why, the doctors have had so much difficulty with it. It’s a unique, they say. How many operations did you have?”

“How many did you have?” Ginger replied, with the caution of the challenged.

“Go on—I asked you first,” said Six-foot-two. “Was it more than eight, anyway?”

“It was ten,” said Ginger.

“Well, I had eleven,” said Six-foot-two proudly. “They went after those bullets eleven times. But they’re all out now. I had every doctor in the place round me.”

“So did I,” said Ginger, “and one of my bullets isn’t out yet. It’s right in the bone. They’re going to try again soon.” He had quite recovered his good-humour.

“What about your patella?” Six-foot-two inquired after a pause.

“My what?”

“Your patella. Do you mean to say the doctors didn’t talk about that?”

“I dare say they may have done, but I don’t remember. Still, *our* doctors don’t talk much—they act.”

“Well, so do ours. There aren’t better doctors

## On Bellona's Hem

in the world than at our place, I can tell you. It's common knowledge. Why, Sir Rashleigh Hewitt is there every day—the great Sir Rashleigh Hewitt, the King's doctor.”

“Well, the King has more than one. Sir Frank Carver is another, and he's at our place day and night. He's a masterpiece.”

“I've always understood,” said Six-foot-two, “that Sir Rashleigh is at the very head of his profession. The nurses say so.”

“He may be for some things,” Ginger conceded. “But not the knee. Sir Frank Carver is the crack knee man. Now if you'd been at our place I dare say that one operation would have been enough for you.”

“Enough? What rot! How could it be enough, with all the complications? I tell you it's a unique, my case.”

“Yes, it may be. But what I'm getting at is that it might not be if you'd had Sir Frank Carver, the great knee specialist, at it at once.”

“Oh, give Sir Frank Carver a rest. Sir Rashleigh Hewitt's good enough for me and for anyone else who knows.”

## The Rivals

“All right,” said Ginger. “Keep your hair on!”

“My hair’s on right enough,” said Six-foot-two. “It’s you who are getting ratty.”

There was a pause, and both lighted new cigarettes, each taking one of his own.

“What puzzles me,” Six-foot-two began slowly, “is no one saying anything about your patella. That’s the great marvel of my case—my patella. It’s full of holes, like a sieve. There’s never been one like it before. The profession’s wild about it. That’s what makes me so interesting to them.”

“Where is it, anyway?” Ginger snapped out.

“In the knee, of course.”

“In the knee! Well, if it’s in the knee mine must be full of holes too. I’ve got everything you can have in the knee, I tell you. Everything.”

“Have they written anything about you in the papers?” Six-foot-two asked. “No. Ah,” he went on triumphantly, “they have about me. There’s a medical paper with a piece in it all about my patella. I sent it home and they’ve framed it. It’s the most astonishing thing in

## On Bellona's Hem

surgery that I should be able to be walking about at all."

"That's what they tell *me*," Ginger replied. "But, anyhow, your bullets are all out. I've got another one yet, and by the time that's out I dare say I shall have had twenty operations and a whole column in the papers. But as for articles in papers, they're nothing. Have you got your X-ray photograph?"

"No," Six-foot-two admitted.

"They gave me mine," said Ginger. "I sent it home. It's over the mantelpiece, my mother says. People come from miles to look at it. It's a pity you didn't get yours. That was foolish of you, if I may say so. Well, so long I'm having tea to-day with one of our grand lady visitors in Rutland Gate. If you don't see me here when you come again, the chances are I shall be having my next operation. So long!"

"So long!" said Six-foot-two.

Ginger on his crutches moved away.

"Extraordinary," Six-foot-two murmured, either to me or to himself or to the Park at large, "how some blokes always want to be the most important things in the world."



## A First Communion in the War Zone ∞

EVERYONE who has made a stay in Paris or in any French town, and has been at all observant, must have noticed, either singly or in little groups, that prettiest of the flora and fauna of Roman Catholic countries, a “first communicant” in her radiant and spotless attire—from white shoes to white veil, and crown of innocence over all. One sees them usually after the ceremony, soberly marching through the streets, or flitting from this friend to that like runaway lilies. Prinking and preening a little in the shop windows, too; and no wonder, for it is something to be thus clad and thus important; and never will such clothes be worn by these wearers again. Meanwhile the younger children envy, and little attendant bodies of proud relations somewhere in the vicinity admire and exult.

If I write as if all “first communicants” are

## On Bellona's Hem

little girls, it is because it is the little girls who are the most noticeable. And who cares about little boys anyway? Yet boys communicate too, and in their broad white collars and with their knots of white ribbon they may also be seen, although less frankly delighted; indeed, often a little self-conscious and ashamed. But the little girls, who know instinctively that women are the backbone of the Roman Catholic Church, they are natural and full of happy pride; they carry it off with style.

In the spring of 1915 it was my fortune not only to know personally a bouquet of these eager little French pietists, but to be present as one of the congregation at the great event—their *première communion*. It was not in Paris, nor in a town at all, but far away in the country, in a village where the guns of Verdun could be heard in the lulls of the service. There were six little girls in all, and I saw them pass into the safe keeping of their new mother, the Church of Rome, and in visible token receive from the officiating hands a pictorial certificate so chromatically violent that it could not but satisfy any childish eyes and, under such conditions of

## A First Communion

emotional excitement, must ever remain as a symbol of their consecration. I heard, too, the curé's address to these lambs, in which he briefly outlined the life and character of Christ and of certain of the disciples, coming to each with much the same tender precision and ecstasy as a fastidious and enthusiastic collector to the choicest porcelain.

But what chiefly interested me was the form of the vow which the good curé—one of the best of men, who, in September 1914, saw his church reduced to ruins and most of his parish destroyed by fire by the invading Huns, and never budged from his post—had himself recently drawn up for such occasions. What the usual form of such documents is I cannot say, but in view of the serious plight of France and the renaissance of patriotic fervour in the brave and unconquerable French nation, the curé had infused into this one an element of public duty hitherto omitted.

At the end of the "jolie cérémonie," as in conversation he called it, and as it truly was, I asked him for a copy of this admirable catechism, and here are a few of its questions and answers.

## On Bellona's Hem

The title is "A Promise to be a good Christian and a good Citizen of France" :

Q. *What is the road to Heaven ?*

A. *That which my mother, the Holy Roman Church, shows me. If I follow it, I am convinced that, while gaining happiness for myself, I shall increase the glory of my family and the honour of my country.*

Q. *Does the Church command you to obey the legitimate laws of your country ?*

A. *Yes ; and I must be ready, if needful, to give my blood for her. (Poor little white peacocks !)*

Q. *On whom do you count to assist you ?*

A. *Here, on earth, on my parents and on my instructors. Above, on God, on the angels and the saints, and principally on my guardian angel, on the holy Saint Peter, and on the blessed Joan of Arc.*

Q. *Who are your enemies ?*

A. *The enemies of France, and those who, all unenlightened, attack the Church.*

Q. *What is your ambition ?*

A. *To see France victorious and united in a bond of love with the Church, to see her add to the tri-colour the Image of the Sacred Heart, and to see her take soon her place at the head of the nations.*

## Young France

Is not that rather fine? It must be to the good thus to blend religion and patriotism. I know that, especially on that soil over which the Germans had spread so devastatingly, one could not listen to these fresh young voices raised together in such idealism without a quickened heart.

## The Ace of Diamonds



THE French, always so quick to give things names—and so liberal about it that, to the embarrassment and undoing of the unhappy foreigner, they sometimes invent fifty names for one thing—have added so many words to the vocabulary since August 1914 that a glossary, and perhaps more than one, has been published to enshrine them. Without the assistance of this glossary it is almost impossible to understand some of the numerous novels of Poilu life.

By no means the least important of these creations is the infinitesimal word “as”—or rather, it is a case of adaptation. Yesterday “as des carreaux” (to give the full form) stood simply for ace of diamonds. To-day all France, with that swift assimilation which has ever been one of its many mysteries, knows its new meaning and applies it. And what is this new meaning?

## “Un as”

Well, “as” has two. Originally it was applied strictly to flying men, and it was reserved to signify an aviator who had brought down his fifth enemy machine. Had he brought down only four he was a gallant fellow enough, but he was not an “as.” One more and he was an ace of diamonds, that card being the fifth honour in most French games as well as in Bridge.

So much for the first and exact meaning of the term. But later, as I gather from a number of *La Baïonnette* devoted to its uses, the word has been extended to cover all kinds of obscure heroes, the men, and they are by no means rare, who do wonderful things but do not get into the papers or receive medals or any mention in dispatches. We all know that many of the finest deeds performed in war escape recognition. One does not want to suggest that V.C.'s and D.S.O.'s and Military Crosses and all the other desirable tokens of valour are conferred wrongly. Nothing of the kind. They are nobly deserved. But probably there never was a recipient of the V.C. or the D.S.O. or the Military Cross who could not—and did not wish to—tell his Sovereign, when the coveted honour

## On Bellona's Hem

was being pinned to his breast, of some other soldier not less worthy than himself of being decorated, whose deed of gallantry was performed under less noticeable conditions. The performer of such a deed is an "as" and it is his luck to be a not public hero.

The "as" can be found in every branch of the army, and he is recognized as one by his comrades, even although the world at large is ignorant. Perhaps we shall find a word for his British correlative, who must be numerically very strong too. The letter A alone might do it, signifying anonymous. "Voilà, un as!" says the French soldier, indicating one of these brave modest fellows who chances to be passing. "You see that chap," one of our soldiers would say; "he's an A."

That satirical child of the war, *La Baïonnette*, every week devotes itself, as its forerunner, *L'Assiette au Beurre*, used to do, to one theme at a time, one phase or facet of the struggle, usually in the army, but also in civil life, where changes due to the war steadily occur. In the number dedicated to the glory of the "as" I find recorded an incident of the French Army



## A Farmyard

so moving that I want to tell it here, very freely, in English. It was, says the writer, before the attack at Carency—and he vouches for the accuracy of his report, for he was himself present. In the little village of Camblain-l'Abbé a regiment was assembled, and to them spoke their captain. The scene was the yard of a farm. I know so well what it was like. The great manure heap in the middle; the carts under cover, with perhaps one or two American reapers and binders among them; fowls pecking here and there; a thin predatory dog nosing about; a cart-horse peering from his stable and now and then scraping his hoofs; a very wide woman at the dwelling-house door; the old farmer in blue linen looking on; and there, drawn up, listening to their captain, row on row of blue-coated men, all hard-bitten, weary, all rather cynical, all weather-stained and frayed, and all ready to go on for ever.

This is what the captain said—a tall thin man of about thirty, speaking calmly and naturally as though he was reading a book. “I have just seen the Colonel,” he said; “he has been in conference with the Commandant, and this is

## On Bellona's Hem

what has been settled. In a day or two it is up to us to attack. You know the place and what it all means. At such and such an hour we shall begin. Very well. Now this is what will happen. I shall be the first to leave the trench and go over the top, and I shall be killed at once. So far so good. I have arranged with the two lieutenants for the elder of them to take my place. He also will almost certainly be killed. Then the younger will lead, and after him the sergeants in turn, according to their age, beginning with the oldest who was with me at Saïda before the war. What will be left by the time you have reached the point I cannot say, but you must be prepared for trouble, as there is a lot of ground to cover, under fire. But you will take the point and hold it. Fall out."

That captain was an "as."

## The Reward of our Brother the Poilu ☺

WE often talk of the best poem which the war has produced; and opinions usually vary. My own vote, so far as England is concerned, is still given to Julian Grenfell's lyric of the fighting man; but if France is to be included too, one must consider very seriously the claims of *La Passion de Notre Frère le Poilu*, by Marc Leclerc, which may be had in a little slender paper-covered book, at a cost, in France, where it has been selling in its thousands, of one franc twenty-five. This poem I have been reading with a pleasure that calls to be shared with others, for it is not only very touching and very beautiful, but it has also certain of those qualities which are more thoroughly appreciated in company. Beauty and tenderness can make their appeal alone; but humour demands two at least and does not resent a crowd, and the

## On Bellona's Hem

humour of this little masterpiece is very deep and true.

Did I say I had been reading it? That is to use words with unjustifiable looseness; rather should I say that I have been in part reading and in part guessing at it; for it is written in the Angevin patois, which is far beyond my linguistic capacity. Not that Captain Leclerc is a rustic; on the contrary, he is a man of culture and the author of several books, chiefly on and about Anjou, one of which has illustrations from his own hand; but it has amused him in this poem to employ his native dialect, while, since he, like so many French authors, is fighting, the soldierly part of it is authentic.

It was a poor devil of a Poilu—it begins—and he went to the war, automatically enough, knowing without any words about it that the soil which he cultivated must also be defended. That was his duty. After suffering the usual ills of the campaign, suddenly a 210 burst near him, and he never rallied. He just had time to give a few messages to the corporal before he died. "You must tell my wife," he said, "but do it gradually; say, I'm ill first. Give what money

## The Last Judgment

I have here to my pals," and so forth. Then, after repeating his testament, he passed quietly away.

On reaching the gate of Heaven the Poilu finds St. Peter beating the mats. "Wipe your shoes," St. Peter says, "and take the right-hand corridor. The Judgment Hall is at the end." All trembling, the poor fellow passes along the corridor, at the end of which an angel in white takes down particulars as to his name, his class, and so forth, and tells him that he is expected. Entering the Judgment Hall, the Poilu is bewildered by its austerity and splendour. The Good God is at the head, between Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin. All the saints are there, and the Poilu notices particularly the military ones—St. George, St. Hubert, St. Michael, St. Leonard, St. Marcel, St. Charlemagne, St. Martin, St. Sulpice, St. Barbe, St. Maurice, and St. Jeanne d'Arc. Seeing all these famous soldiers, he exclaims, "It's a Conseil de Guerre! Perhaps I can slip away." But escape is impossible, and at this moment the Good God tells him to begin his history.

"What did you do before the war?" He asks.

## On Bellona's Hem

The Poilu replies that he was a farmer in a very small way; he worked on the land, and he had some stock—two oxen, a horse, a cow, a wife, some fowls, “and, saving your presence, a pig.” “Ah!” exclaims St. Anthony, “a pig! That reminds me! Pigs! Sois béni, mon frère.” But the Good God frowns, and St. Anthony makes himself very small.

And then, the Poilu continues, he became a soldier, which leads to the awkward question, had he always behaved himself as such? Alas! it appears that he had not. For one thing, he has not always been sober, he is confessing, when Noah interrupts with the comment that insobriety is not such a very serious affair. In fact, he himself once . . . and by this time the reader begins to get the drift of this joyous humane fantasy, the point being that the hierarchy of Heaven are all on the side of the brave simple soldier who has died that France might live. As how could they not be? Another time, the Poilu continues, he was sent to prison for cutting a piece from his coat in order to mend the seat of his trousers—in other words, for injuring Government property; and here St. Martin breaks in with indignation

## Saint Martin

at the punishment. "Why, when I did very much the same," he says, "and cut my cloak to cover a paralytic, I was canonized for it!" And so on.

Then comes a graver note. The Poilu, feeling an effort to be necessary, for the Good God has never relaxed His sternness throughout, becomes eloquent. Not only was he killed, but before that, he says, he suffered much. The hardships of war on the Western front are terrible. He had been famished, he had been frozen, he had been burned by the sun. He had been sleepless, he had been footsore, and the sweat had poured from him under his heavy burdens, for often he had carried not only his own haversack but those of his comrades. In short . . . But here St. Simon, speaking softly to Christ, says, "Like you, Lord, at Golgotha." In my prose this is, of course, too crude; but I assure you that in the poem it is a great moment. And another follows it, for as the Good God still says nothing, the Poilu points to the blue robe of the Blessed Virgin, and to the great white beard of the Good God himself, and to the red cloak of our Lord, and exclaims, "*Voilà mes trois couleurs.*"

## On Bellona's Hem

The three colours of France. It was for them that I have lost my life; fighting for them has brought me to this Judgment Hall!"

That is fine, is it not? Only the French genius is capable of just such a splendid blend of naïveté, emotion, and the best kind of theatricalism. And at these words at last the Good God smiles, and behind Him Heaven opens for the Poilu to enter.

There is a little more—for it seems that Heaven is full of Poilus with blue caps, and golden helmets, and wings that remove the possibility of getting wet feet or weary feet any more for ever and ever. And our Poilu joins these others, who look happy and are happy, and sings with them "Glory to God in the highest," while the angels, not perhaps wholly without irony, answer, "Peace on earth and goodwill to men."



Note      ∩      ∩      ∩      ∩      ∩      ∩

WITH the exception of a few pages, the longest essay in this book—that which gives it its title—is now published for the first time. The papers grouped under the headings “Diversions” and “On Bellona’s Hem” which follow have already appeared in print, in *Punch* and *The Sphere*, but in their present form have been always revised and often extended.

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